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at Destinations: The Holiday & Travel Show, 1st – 4th February 2018, Olympia London

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Manchester EventCity 18 – 21 Jan 2018  
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## Theatre talks by LATA members:

**Thursday 3:45pm, Meet the Experts - Theatre One:**

Luxury Experiences in South America with Martin Johnson, Latin Routes

**Saturday 10:30am, Meet the Experts - Theatre Two:**

Getting to Machu Picchu with Owen Denton, Tucan Travel

**Saturday 11:45am, Meet the Experts - Theatre One:**

Bolivia's lowlands with Bibiana Tellez Garside, Geodyssey

**Sunday 3:30pm, Meet the Experts - Theatre Two:**

Haiti: The Hidden Caribbean with Paul Clammer, Bradt Travel Guides



Plus – visit the *Experience the Americas* stage to experience the food, drink, music and culture of Latin America with live and interactive demonstrations throughout the day

Visit [destinationsshow.com](http://destinationsshow.com) for information

Costa Rica



**Rites of springs**  
The lush, natural waters of Tabacón make for a relaxing end to a day's hiking on Mount Arenal

◀ with sand. This took a while, as each one paused to recover from its exertions. While the younger turtle initially seemed to be faster and stronger, experience eventually won, with the older mama the first to turn towards the sea and lumber her way back down the beach excruciatingly slowly. We all had a lump in our throats as she finally entered the water and gradually disappeared from view.

## Back on the water

I was still on a high early the next morning when I took a boat trip on the canals. We were in a rather noisy launch and I wondered if we were going to see much in the way of wildlife, but I needn't have feared. We soon took diversions into quiet channels and various nooks and crannies, the boatman turning the engine off whenever his keen eyes spotted anything. It was like being in a BBC wildlife documentary as he pointed to long-nosed bats camouflaged on a tree trunk, huge iguanas lounging on tree branches, and a caiman cunningly disguised as a log. Sloths, howler monkeys and spider monkeys gazed on us from high in the canopy, along with both green macaws and the rarely seen scarlet variety. Closer to eye level, extraordinary looking green basilisk lizards were basking on the lower branches of trees, a prehistoric fin-like crest along their backs. If this seemed like a nature theme park, my final stop in Costa Rica made me aware of the power of nature in a different way. I spent

my last full day near Mount Arenal, the iconic volcano with a seemingly perfect cone. The peak was initially covered in cloud but that gradually cleared, revealing its distinctive shape. Although at first glance it looks symmetrical, peer closer and you can see another crater on its western flank, the result of a dramatic eruption in 1968 when the previously dormant volcano sprang to life. Since 2010 it has been dormant again, but locals still worry about it.

**'It was like being in a wildlife documentary as he pointed to huge iguanas lounging on tree branches and a caiman disguised as a log'**

I took a sky tram up through the nearby cloud forest and then walked back down, crossing several 'hanging' suspension bridges along the way. "You'll be ready to relax your limbs," said my guide. "We have the perfect activity for that this evening." Tabacón Thermal Resort has natural thermal springs running through its grounds, and has turned these into a series of interconnecting pools, some with waterfalls. I must admit to feeling sceptical about it when I arrived, fearing a 'cheesy' experience. But, as dusk fell, I escaped the busy first pool and headed up through foliage-fringed paths until I found a small pool with no one else in it and impressive views gazing out towards the huge dark outline of the Arenal volcano.

The water was like a warm bath, and steam rose off it dramatically. A storm was approaching, and as I floated in the soothing warmth, thunder rumbled behind Arenal, the sky occasionally lit up by a sheet of lightning. Pura vida, I thought. Yes, definitely pura vida. **W**



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## Costa Rica Footnotes

### VITAL STATISTICS

**Capital:** San José  
**Population:** 4.9 million  
**Language:** Spanish. English is fairly widely spoken  
**Time:** GMT-6  
**International dialling code:** +506  
**Visas:** Not required by UK nationals for stays of up to three months.  
**Money:** Costa Rican colón (CRC), currently around CRC752 to the UK£. US dollars are also widely accepted, and many ATMs dispense both dollars and colones. Credit and debit cards are widely accepted.

### When to go

|     |     |      |     |     |     |
|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|
| Jan | Feb | Mar  | Apr | May | Jun |
| Jul | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec |

- **High season** – the driest season across much of the country (but you should still expect a fair bit of rain).
- **Mid-season** – more rain, fewer people.
- **Low season** – the 'Green' season sees rainfall peak across most of the country. However, this also means dry season on the Caribbean coast side and turtle-nesting season at Tortuguero.

### Health & safety

The water is usually safe to drink (check if unsure). Recommended immunisations usually include hepatitis A, tetanus and diphtheria; there's also a possible risk of malaria on the Caribbean coast but check with your doctor. Violent crime against visitors is rare, but take the usual precautions.

### Further reading & information

**Costa Rica** (Rough Guides, 2017) – up-to-date overview of the country  
[www.visitcostarica.com](http://www.visitcostarica.com) – official tourist board site  
[www.lata.org](http://www.lata.org) – the Latin American Travel Association

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### ARCHIVE ARTICLES

- ◆ First 24 hours: San José – issue 178
- ◆ Trip Planner: Costa Rica – issue 164
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- ◆ Getting Back to Nature – issue 106

### PLANNING GUIDES

- ◆ Costa Rica travel guide

### THE TRIP

The author travelled courtesy of the **Costa Rica Tourist Board** and stayed in Pacuare Lodge; Pachira Lodge, Tortuguero; Selva Verde Lodge, Sarapiquí; Hotel Montaña de Fuego, La Fortuna de San Carlos.

### Getting there

Direct flights with **British Airways** ([britishairways.com](http://britishairways.com)) go once a week from London Heathrow to San José (Juan Santamaría International, around 20km from the capital). Fares from £619 return; flights take about 4.5 hours. Other services require changes in Europe or the USA.

### Getting around

Domestic airlines include **Nature Air** ([natureair.com](http://natureair.com)) and **Sansa Regional** ([flysansa.com](http://flysansa.com)). To get to Tortuguero, you will need to fly from San José or do a road/boat combination. Boats run from La Pavona, Moin and Caño Blanco, with buses connecting the major centres. But if you hire a car, it is best to have a 4WD.

### Accommodation

The award-winning ecolodge **Pacuare Lodge** ([pacuarelodge.com](http://pacuarelodge.com)) has excellent food and service. It offers rafting, canyoning, zip-lining and guided hiking. From US\$965pp (£723) for a three-day package, including transport from San José, rafting in and/or out and all meals.

The nearby **Rios Tropicales Lodge** ([riostropicales.com](http://riostropicales.com)) offers a three-day package from US\$385pp (£288) for a double, and has cheaper bunk-bed stays. In Sarapiquí, **Selva Verde Lodge** ([selvaverde.com](http://selvaverde.com)) was one of the pioneer ecolodges. Rooms are basic and rather tired, but it has a great range of activities, superb birdwatching, good naturalist guides and a fine restaurant. Rooms from US\$123pn (£91), including breakfast.

Plenty of stays line Tortuguero's canals. **Tortuga Lodge** ([tortugalodge.com](http://tortugalodge.com)) is perhaps the best; a three-day package (incl transport) costs from US\$646pp (£483). **Pachira Lodge** ([pachiralodge.com](http://pachiralodge.com)) is simpler but friendly, and used by tour groups; US\$328pp (£245) for a three-day package. Its sister lodge **Evergreen** ([evergreentortuguero.com](http://evergreentortuguero.com)) is the same price, set in forest, and has both kayaks (free to use) and a zip wire.

### Food & drink

National dish **gallo pinto** (rice and beans) is often eaten with eggs and plantain for breakfast. Fine seafood is found on the Caribbean coast, including dishes such as **arroz con camarones** (rice with prawns). Vegetarians may struggle. The **coffee** is excellent. There is also an array of **craft beers** to complement local brews Imperial and Bavaria. Chilean wine is widely available.

### Turtle Watching

Wear black or dark clothing – bright colours can scare turtles off. Avoid perfume or strong odours. No cameras or video-recording equipment are allowed. No lights are allowed on the beach; you can take a torch (or use the one on your phone) for walking to or from the beach, but you then have to keep it off. As you

are walking on the beach in the dark, there may be stones or driftwood underfoot, so it may be best to wear closed shoes rather than sandals.

For further information on the **STC** (Sea Turtle Conservancy), be sure to visit [conserveturtles.org](http://conserveturtles.org). The organisation also runs an eco-volunteer programme, with one-, two- or three-week options.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF GREEN SEASON



### 1 Turtle watching

Green turtles nest at Tortuguero between Jul and early Oct, the hatchlings emerging around 65 days after the eggs are laid. Several other beaches on both of Costa Rica's coastlines are home to turtles. Most spectacular are the mass arrivals, known as an *arribada*, of thousands of olive ridley turtles. These can be seen at Ostional and Playa Nancite on the Pacific coast between Jun and Feb (the peak is Aug to Nov), but dates are difficult to predict (pictured).

### 2 Whale watching

Humpback whales arrive in Costa Rica every year between July and October from the Antarctic after a journey of some 8,000 kilometres. September is the peak season, and the community of Bahía Ballena, centred in Uvita, hosts a yearly Whale and Dolphin Festival at this time.

### 3 Birdwatching

You will see birds in Costa Rica at any time of year – after all, there are over 880 species found in the country. But September is a key migration time for northern hemisphere birds, arriving to winter here or in countries further south.

### 4 Rafting

Increased rain in Green season raises the water levels of the Pacuare and other rivers. True, you risk days when the river is too high to be safe, but, most of the time, the flow is faster at this time of year, leading to a more exhilarating experience.

### 5 Surfing

Surfing in Costa Rica during Green season means larger and more plentiful waves. Even if you're not up to tackling the surf yourself, fun can be had watching the experts. Noted beaches are Puerto Viejo, Playa Tamarindo and Playa Hermosa.

