

# TIPS AND TIDBITS

A fact sheet about your

## WALKING COSTA RICA & PANAMA

Adventure

*Walking Adventures International plans and guides walking adventures that combine international travel with walking. Our itineraries blend historic, cultural, and scenic highlights of the regions we're traveling through with walks in the area. Our trips are fast-paced; they are designed as overview tours to expose travelers to as much of the region's significant highlights as we can manage, and still maintain a reasonable daily schedule. Even though most walkers find it easy and natural to enjoy our style of travel, we want to ensure that we've afforded every opportunity for travelers to know what to expect, in advance! Listed below are a series of questions and answers to help you develop accurate expectations of this Adventure and make plans to maximize your enjoyment. Please feel free to call us with any additional questions you have.*

### Questions & Answers

**Q: Do you have more detailed information than is available in the *Costa Rica & Panama* brochure?**

- A: About three weeks before departure, a final packet will be mailed to each participant. This packet will include:
- \*Hotel Listing (including address and phone information of all hotels)
  - \*Traveler List
  - \*Daily Schedule
  - \*Tour t-shirt
  - \*Nametag
  - \*Adventure Map
  - \*Reusable luggage tags for first-time travelers

**Q: Do I need a passport, visa, or shots?**

- A: You will need a valid passport with at least one blank visa page; for each country that you will enter. Be advised that many countries now require that the passport be valid for at least six months after the date of entry into that country. Be sure that your passport meets this requirement. Passports can usually be obtained by applying at your town's main post office. They generally take at least six weeks to process, however, so don't delay!

**IMPORTANT:** Please make a copy of your passport and birth certificate and keep them in your luggage separate from where you keep your passport. In case your passport gets lost, having these copies really speeds up the replacement process!

**Visa/Tourist Card:** Costa Rica does not require a visa for U.S. or Canadian citizens. Panama, however, requires U.S. and Canadian citizens to purchase a tourist card or obtain a visa. For those of you participating in Panama only, you may purchase a tourist card prior to your departure flight into Panama, from the airline ticket counter serving Panama; for \$5 USD in cash. Those of you joining us for the full Costa Rica and Panama Adventure may purchase your tourist card at the San Jose airport (Costa Airline ticket counter) prior to our departure flight to Panama.

**NOTE: Costa Rica requires a \$26 departure tax be paid in cash (USD) at the airport in Costa Rica prior to check-in for your departing flight.**

No shots are required. However, some vaccinations are recommended — show our itinerary to your personal physician and he/she can recommend a proper course of action for you. Also, we have found travel health clinics to be reliable sources of information. You can find them in the yellow pages or online. Two examples are [www.ushealthworks.com](http://www.ushealthworks.com) and [www.passporthealthusa.com](http://www.passporthealthusa.com).

**Q: Do you have any suggestions to help with connecting flights?**

- A: WAI is not a travel agent, and we don't have the authority to make individual bookings or print airline tickets.

**By now your flights should be booked. If you have not yet booked your flights, we strongly suggest that you do so as soon as possible. We recommend that you contact the travel agent with whom we work:**

**Debbi Custer, at 888.276.0925 or [debbi@wtpdx.com](mailto:debbi@wtpdx.com).**

Debbi knows our program and would be glad to assist you in finding a competitive fare. There are many other sources, including AAA, if you are a member, and a host of internet web sites. To start your planning, [www.orbitz.com](http://www.orbitz.com) is a good site to find which flights are available on the days of travel. For the best fares, we've found it's better to go to the web site of the specific airline serving your home and destination. Often you can leave your e-mail address and they'll contact you when they have specials flying to cities that interest you most. Other sites to check out include:

**Airline sites:**

[www.continental.com](http://www.continental.com)  
[www.southwest.com](http://www.southwest.com)  
[www.united.com](http://www.united.com)  
[www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com) (American)  
[www.alaskaair.com](http://www.alaskaair.com)  
[www.usairways.com](http://www.usairways.com)  
[www.delta.com](http://www.delta.com)

**Planning sites:**

[www.travelocity.com](http://www.travelocity.com)  
[www.expedia.com](http://www.expedia.com)  
[www.orbitz.com](http://www.orbitz.com)  
[www.onetravel.com](http://www.onetravel.com)  
[www.bestfares.com](http://www.bestfares.com)  
[www.priceline.com](http://www.priceline.com)  
[www.qix.com](http://www.qix.com)

**NOTE:** As flight delays and missed connections become a more common occurrence, the advantages of departing for the starting point one day early increases. We propose that you consider planning your flights to arrive one day early, thereby minimizing the stress of any possible delays and allowing an additional day to

recover from the trip before the Adventure begins in earnest. For help in booking a pre-night hotel room, just give us a call.

**What about jet lag?** Since we will be on Central time in Costa Rica and Eastern time in Panama, this should not be much of a problem.

**Q: What are the plans for rendezvousing?**

A: The starting point of the Costa Rica Adventure is the San Jose International Airport in Costa Rica. WAI tour leaders will meet you at the airport and arrange your transfer to our hotel in nearby La Garita. Since flights generally arrive very late in the evening, no group activities are planned on arrival day. Our first group activity will be at breakfast the following morning in the poolside restaurant of beautiful Hotel Martino.

The starting point of the Panama Adventure is the Tocumen International Airport in Panama City. A WAI representative will meet you at the airport and help you arrange transportation to the Country Inn and Suites Hotel on the banks of the Panama Canal. The first group activity will be an orientation dinner on February 24.

**Q: What type of hotels will we be in?**

A: In Costa Rica we will stay in a pleasant blend of resort hotels and rainforest lodges. Four nights are spent in modern 4-star properties; two nights will be spent in a cloud forest lodge near the Arenal Volcano; four nights will be in two different rustic and charming jungle lodges just a stone's throw from the Caribbean Sea. For those going to Panama, all four nights will be in the same, quality 3/4-star hotel along the Panama Canal.

**Q: What are walks like in Costa Rica & Panama?**

A: Costa Rica and Panama are walker-friendly countries with many hiking trails. Most of our walks will be on forest trails with the exception of the two city walks we are offering. Be prepared for a wide variety of trails. We will be walking at sea level and at 3000 feet. Some walks will be broad, level paths and others will involve steep, uphill terrain. Walk difficulty levels are gauged using the rating system of the American Volkssport Association ranging from 1 to 5. Following is a description of the rating system:

1. An easy walk on pavement or well-maintained trail with no significant hills. Probably suitable for wheelchairs and strollers.
2. A moderately easy walk, may be on pavement or on trails. No significant difficulty with hills. May not be suitable for wheelchairs and strollers.
3. A moderate walk in any setting with some difficult terrain, one or two substantial hills and/or steps. Strollers and wheelchairs questionable.
4. A more difficult walk. Most likely in a natural setting with poorly maintained paths and steeper or hilly inclines. Not likely to be wheelchair or stroller accessible. Participants with certain health problems should take caution.
5. A very difficult walk. All in rough fields or woods. Many steep hills or high altitude trails, or very rough uneven terrain, steep or unstable inclines. Not suitable for any person who is not in good health

None of the walks will be more difficult than a #3 rating. Your guide will be able to give you a good idea of what

to expect prior to each walk. We normally allow between 3 to 3¼ hours for each walk, depending upon our itinerary for the day and the sightseeing opportunities along the route. Of course, none of the walks are mandatory and we encourage travelers to pace themselves. Take a day off or do a partial walk as necessary. Just let the guide know your needs, and we'll help you make adjustments.

If you typically take a water bottle when you walk, plan to do so in Costa Rica and Panama as well. It may be easier to buy a bottle of water from a market and reuse the container than to pack an empty bottle in your luggage.

**Q: What is a volkswalk?**

A: Volkssport is a club activity that began in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland in 1968. There are four primary activities: walking, biking, swimming, and cross country skiing. Walking is, by far, the most popular and well developed. A volkswalk is a steady walk through a scenic and/or historic area over a pre-marked route (usually 10 km, which is 6.2 miles). It is noncompetitive and aims to involve people of all ages. Everyone who participates is declared a WINNER! Presently, there are walks in all 50 states and more than 30 countries worldwide.

**Q: What type of footwear should I bring?**

A: Two pairs of walking shoes or boots are recommended. The first pair may get wet or muddy and need a day off. Plan to pack an extra pair of socks with your extra shoes in a plastic bag (good for wet gear), and have a spot for them right on the bus with you. The increase in the number of light-weight hiking boots is making them a more practical and attractive option. Those of you going river rafting will need footwear that can get wet and will not slip off your feet.

**Q: Is the water drinkable in the countries we're visiting? Are there any health precautions I should take?**

A: Water is considered safe to drink from taps in the tourist towns. Our recommendation, however, is to drink only bottled water during this trip.

One of the realities of group travel is that we share a lot of things — including germs. As a result, cold nasties can quickly travel through the bus looking for weak immune systems to attack. There are several supplements and behaviors that can make a significant difference in your ability to resist these bugs and preserve a healthy adventure, including the following:

- \* Use Vitamin C and Echinacea beginning a week before the tour and during the tour to boost your immune system (check with your doctor for possible allergies to Echinacea).
- \* Maintain the use of a good multi-vitamin both before and during the tour.
- \* Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently (carrying a waterless hand cleaner is highly recommended).
- \* If/when you cough, cover your mouth as completely as possible to avoid the spread of germs in consideration of fellow travelers.
- \* Avoid touching your face and rubbing your eyes.

- \* Be sensitive to your health and particularly your need for rest. Guard against fatigue by monitoring your participation in tour activities and allowing yourself necessary "down time."

#### Prescriptions:

Though we have not had problems with prescription drugs at customs before, we recommend that you bring a note from your doctor verifying your need for any prescription drugs you will bring on the tour.

#### Q: How many people do you accept on a trip?

A: Generally, we close the tour at no more than 30 people. Often, however, our groups are smaller than that. This group will likely be one of our smaller groups.

#### Q: What is the average age of your groups?

A: Most of our travelers fall between 50 and 70 years of age. This seems to be the age bracket that has the time and means to travel. However, we always have travelers that fall outside that range, from the 20's up into the 80's. Walkers are characteristically great traveling companions — positive, cheerful, and appreciative of the opportunity to see the world.

#### Q: What is the split between men and women?

A: One of the realities of life is that there are more women on the planet than men. Another is that they tend to outlive their spouses. As a result, we do have more women on the trips than men. The percentage of women on the trip can run anywhere from 60 to 80%. We have quite a few couples, a lot of women traveling together or singly, and the occasional single male traveler. We like to see this ratio as even as possible and are always looking for a few more good men!

#### Q: What if I don't have a roommate?

A: It's always best to register for the trip with your own roommate, but we do offer to help match travelers up with others needing roommates. We provide contact information for potential roommates and allow travelers to contact each other and make their own decisions.

#### Q: How much money should I take along?

A: The most practical formula seems to be a combination of foreign currency (cash!) and credit or debit cards. We therefore request that you buy foreign currency here at your bank, get a money belt, and carry your cash underneath your clothes, close to your heart (only in San Jose and Panama City). A *minimum* which should cover only your lunches and beverages at dinner is:

**\$100 in Costa Rican colones**

**\$100 USD (as backup) — Panama uses U.S. dollars**

***Be aware that you will be responsible for paying a \$26 departure tax in cash (USD) at the airport in Costa Rica prior to check-in for your departing flight. For those traveling into Panama, you will be responsible for paying a \$5 tourist card fee in cash (USD) at our departure airline ticket counter, in lieu of a Panama visa.***

When ordering from your bank, ask for the foreign equivalent of this U.S. dollar amount. Remember, this recommended amount is only the minimum, no-frills

amount you would need if you intended to do no shopping. Many travelers take double or triple this amount.

If you are having trouble getting cooperation from your local bank, try Thomas Cook, AAA, or some of the new internet outlets ([www.travelex.com](http://www.travelex.com)). A last resort would be to buy some in the airport before you depart the States, but airport rates are almost always less favorable.

Credit cards are widely accepted by larger merchants, but check before you purchase to see if a surcharge is applied for using a credit card. ATM machines are becoming more readily available in San Jose and Panama City, though still not as widespread as here in the States. We've sometimes experienced difficulty using ATM's and noticed that debit cards that are part of the PLUS network seem to work more consistently.

It is always a good idea to make photocopies of all the credit cards you're using while you're traveling. These photocopies should, of course, be kept separate from the cards themselves.

We also suggest you have a good supply of small bills for street markets. In addition, try to avoid situations where you are using large denomination bills for small purchases. Getting large amounts of change from vendors can be a problem. The hotel reception desk can often help to break your larger bills.

The rate is generally 2-3% less favorable for selling the foreign currency back to the bank when you get home than for buying it. All things being equal, it's better to spend the money overseas than to bring it home and exchange it back into dollars.

#### Q: What about snakes and other precautions?

A: Though there are poisonous species of snakes in Costa Rica, there is a much greater chance of dying while crossing the street in San Jose than receiving a poisonous snakebite there. Be advised to use extreme caution when vehicular traffic is present since cars don't usually stop for pedestrians. And like everywhere else in the world, it is always a good idea to take precautions in crowded places to avoid being pick pocketed, particularly in San Jose and Panama City.

#### Q: What type of clothing is appropriate?

A: The locals in Costa Rica and Panama tend to be casual dressers, and casual tourist attire will be the norm for the entire trip. Most of the time, we are dressed in our walking clothes. Our own strategy is to take mostly shorts with zip-on legs and t-shirts. We supplement this with a good-quality pair of breathable raingear (e.g. Gore-Tex). Additionally, we take along a sweater or sweatshirt to layer under the rain jacket. Remember, for the most part, think warm weather.

You may wish to bring along a set of casual non-walking clothes (slacks or nice jeans for the men and a skirt or dress for the ladies) for the odd occasion when you feel like wearing something other than walking attire.

#### Weather:

*We will be in the tropics where the weather tends to be warm and humid (70's and 80's) year-round. When we visit the cloud forest, you may want to have a sweater*

*and light jacket with long pants. When we are on the Caribbean coast it will be hotter and more humid. It can get into the 90's but there is usually a cool breeze at night. We are visiting Costa Rica and Panama during the dry season, but there are places in the rain forest where it rains nearly everyday, so be prepared for a warm shower.*

**Q: Do you have a suggested reading list for this trip?**

A: Yes, below we have compiled a list of suggested reading for this trip. Having historical background information on the areas you will visit will greatly enhance your experience.

- \* Costa Rica: A Traveler's Literary Companion by Barbara Ras and Oscar Arias
- \* The Ticos: Culture and Social Change in Costa Rica by Mavis Hiltunen Biesanz, Richard Biesanz, and Karen Zubris Biesanz
- \* Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal by David McCullough
- \* Tropical Nature : Life and Death in the Rain Forests of Central and South America by Adrian Forsyth and Ken Miyata

### **Other Important Information**

**MEALS:**

Breakfast and dinner plus several lunches are included in the tour price. For lunches not included, you will love the great assortment of fresh fruits that are available. There will be many markets, bakeries, cafes, and American fast-food franchise restaurants to choose from.

**CALLING/MAILING HOME:**

Calling home from Central America can be expensive. It is usually less expensive to give a copy of our itinerary to your friends and relatives and have them call you. The cheapest way to call home is over the internet using a service such as Skype at an Internet café. The next best strategy is to purchase an international calling card available at many shops throughout Costa Rica and Panama. In Costa Rica, look for calling cards from ICE, the government phone monopoly. In Panama, look for a ClaroCOM card. Travelers have also had good luck with pre-paid phone cards purchased here in the States, although these rates can tend to be higher than purchasing a calling card in country once you arrive. Also, remember that each country has its own postal system and stamps. Be sure to use postage stamps that match the country you're mailing postcards and letters from.

**LAUNDRY:**

Central America generally doesn't use our self-serve laundromat concept. As a result, having laundry done is costly. We recommend one of two approaches: 1) pack a few feet of clothes line and do your laundry in your room, or 2) pack tightly and bring enough essentials so that you don't need to do laundry until you return home. Be advised that foreign hotels do not always provide washcloths (the locals don't use 'em), so take your own if this is something you would miss.

**ELECTRICITY:**

Household current in Central America is 110-120 volts, like in the United States.

**GRATUITIES:**

Gratuities for meals and lodging are included in the cost of the tour. The tour price also includes the tip for the driver and any local guides that serve us. If you have a served meal on your own, be advised that a 10% service charge is automatically included in your bill. A nominal extra tip is appropriate when service warrants it but is not necessarily expected.

**LUGGAGE:**

As you will notice in the General Tour Conditions, we request that you limit your luggage to one suitcase per person plus carry-on type luggage. In addition, we will need to use overnight luggage for the two nights in Tortuguero. This limitation is due to the boat transport in and the light plane transport back to San Jose. Luggage for this last leg of the trip is limited to a **TOTAL of 25 pounds per person; including your carry-on items.** We will rendezvous with any excess luggage at the San Jose airport upon arrival from Tortuguero.

Remember that portage is not provided on this tour. While your luggage is your responsibility, rest assured that your WAI guide will not abandon you to a difficult luggage situation.

**TRAVELER'S PERSPECTIVE:**

As with most things in life, the benefit you receive from this experience will depend to a large degree on the frame of mind you have at the outset. If you've not traveled outside the U.S. before here are a few things to be aware of:

- Though we attempt to eliminate it as much as possible, travel always contains an element of uncertainty. Being ready to adjust will enhance your travel experience.
- Hotels, food, and local customs and standards differ from country to country. This can be both uncomfortable and exciting, depending upon your perspective.
- Though we continue to look for ways to slow the pace of our adventures, we still believe in providing a full day of travel opportunities for our travelers. On some days, we will spend a significant amount of time en route from one activity or location to another.
- Group travel, by its nature, involves relinquishing a certain degree of individual convenience. Though we continue to look for ways to add flexibility for the individual, much of the time we all need to be "*headed in the same direction.*"

*We hope we've covered your questions. If not, feel free to contact us and we'll be glad to fill in the gaps. We look forward to walking Costa Rica and Panama with you!*

### Adventure Checklist

Though by no means intended to be comprehensive, following is a list of things you should probably consider bringing with you on this walking adventure.

- airline tickets
- passport
- rain gear
- walking stick
- sun screen and lip balm
- sense of adventure
- earplugs
- foreign currency
- clothing that can be layered
- two pairs of walking shoes (or boots)
- sunglasses
- sense of humor
- vitamins
- prescriptions
- camera (with extra batteries)
- extra film / memory cards
- travel binoculars
- road maps (to follow our progress)
- handi-wipes or waterless hand cleaner (for quick cleanup on bus)
- hat or visor
- walking credit books
- copy of passport & birth certificate
- photocopies of credit/debit cards
- mini-flashlight
- insect repellent
- WAI Walking Journal from prior trips
- highlighter for marking road/walking maps
- swim suit
- NO knives, scissors, sharp objects in carry-ons at airports
- sheet protector for walk map/directions in rain
- travel towel
- rafting footwear
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*"Come walk with me!"*

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