

## Advisory: 044 (Costa Rica)

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### Costa Rica



Costa Rica is a country located in Central America that has unlimited tourist potential and is ranked as one of the most visited international destinations. One of Costa Rica's main sources of income is tourism. Around 45,000 British nationals visited Costa Rica in 2013. Most visits are trouble-free, but incidents of violent crime against tourists have increased.

Theft is the common crime to threaten tourists. Petty theft in particular is extremely common in highly populated and well known tourist areas and includes pickpocketing, mugging and purse snatching. Recently however there has been large increase in passport theft and credit card fraud. Many victims of credit card fraud are physically in possession of their card, but their credit card information was stolen and later used without their knowledge.

Foreigners have been the target of armed robberies and drug-related crime. Areas in the vicinity of tourist attractions, resorts, airports, bus stations, harbour facilities (particularly the ports of Limon and Puntarenas) and public transport are a particular target of criminals. Visitors to Tamarindo, Jaco, Quepos, Manuel Antonio and Tarcoles River on the Pacific Coast and Puerto Viejo and Cahuita on the Atlantic Coast should pay particular attention to their surroundings

Security risks are heightened in the capital city of San Jose. High-risk areas for theft in San Jose include the Coca-Cola bus station, inner downtown areas and public parks. There is some risk after dark of criminal activities on roads from San Jose airport – we advise travelers to consider this risk when planning their arrival time at the airport.

The kidnapping rate is very low and rarely involves tourists. The majority of kidnappings are a result of feuds between rival criminal organizations. OIJ, Costa Rica's investigative police, have a 100 percent resolution rate on kidnappings.

Protests occur in the heavily populated areas on occasion but are generally peaceful. There was one violent protest on May 1, 2013 ("May Day"), when protestors voiced their demands for fair pay and better working conditions. During the protests, self-proclaimed anarchists staged riots in front of the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly in San Jose, burning the American flag and cardboard cutouts of President Obama, chanting "Obama: Go home!". All protests should be avoided. To avoid perception of interfering in local politics, Americans should avoid protests. The

Constitution bars foreigners from political activity, and foreigners involved with protests, even peaceful ones, could be arrested.

Violent attacks including rape and other sexual offences are rare but there have been some in recent years. You should maintain at least the same level of personal security awareness as in the UK, including when using ATMs Don't accept lifts from strangers. Avoid leaving drinks unattended in bars as there have been reports of 'spiked' drinks resulting in assault and theft.

For years, Costa Rica has been a major transit zone for narcotics due to its geographic location, porous borders, and thinly patrolled waters. The absence of a military and a historically poorly equipped, under-manned police service made it easy for the cartels to operate. Costa Rica is, however, improving its focus on counter-narcotics programs. In 2013, 19 metric tons of cocaine were seized, a 33 percent increase from 14.73 tons in 2012. Costa Rica is a leading eradicator of marijuana, seizing 1,390 metric tons in 2013, a near 50 percent increase from 2012. These successes can be attributed to the recent improvements in equipment that the government has made, including boats for the Coast Guard, patrol trucks for the newly-formed border police, and new helicopters for air surveillance.

Costa Rica has a long tradition of stable democracy, has not had military since 1948, and prides itself on its peaceful nature. There is no history of religious or ethnic violence or violent civil unrest.



Costa Rica has coastlines on both the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean, the latter being the more attractive for cruising. The hilly interior and attractive capital San José can be visited from either Puntarenas or Limón. There are active volcanos, cloud forests, hot springs and an abundance of national parks. The marina which is part of the Los Suenos Resort, a luxury development at Herradura, in the eastern part of the Gulf of Nicoya, is a good base from which to explore the country.

Compared to Panama and Mexico, Costa Rica is expensive. Diesel, marina fees (\$2 - 3 per foot) and provisions can be costly.

The beautiful Isla del Coco, situated 532 km from the Costa Rican coast in the Pacific Ocean, is a National Park and sought-after diving paradise. A permit is required to visit which must be applied for after arriving in Costa Rica.

As mentioned previously, petty crime has a large impact on visitors to Costa Rica and the coastal resorts are no exception. A police force known as Policia Turistica have now been assigned to help ensure that tourists are well protected and assisted. As with all South America countries, keep your valuables under lock and key and padlock or secure down below any valuable loose items on deck. Cruisers who have visited recommend not leaving your yacht unattended at night.

Golfito has a problem with outboard theft so take extra precautions. Secure your outboard and tender at all times with a big chain so thieves cannot just cut the cables and pry things off with crowbars.

Take special care when swimming from all beaches in Costa Rica. Rip tides are very common. There are normally no lifeguards. You should seek reliable local advice. 84 people died in drowning and other beach-related incidents in 2013.

There are regular sightings of crocodiles along the Pacific Coast near beaches popular with surfers (from Playa Azul down to Playa Esterillos) and there have been attacks in recent years.

### Allmode advice for securing your yacht

#### Securing your Yacht: Allmode basic advice

- Very low freeboard at the swim platform, so it's variability and must have a deck watch at anchor.
- Deck watches must be maintained during anchorage and in marina / port.
- Gangway and Passerelle watches to be maintained 24/7 in ports and marinas.
- Limit access control points in ports and marinas.
- Ask for visitors details and photo I/D before they arrive and inform the watch keepers.
- Always check I/D and search visitors / day workers / agents before boarding and before disembarking
- A guard zone should be put on the radar in anchorages as early warning to approaching vessels
- Ensure that the watch keepers and crew have tested communications equipment at all times.
- Test and rehears alarm systems and ensure crew are clear what each alarm means and their duties
- Check all on-board security equipment regularly
- AIS should be sanitised. "Allmode recommend AIS remains on throughout the transit and all sensitive data is removed. (I.e. Destination, number of crew etc.)"
- It is recommend to have night vision devices to maintained watches during hours of darkness
- Lock down drills are to be rehearsed and an area designated for a citadel in case of a boarding

**For more in-depth advice on how to secure your yacht, please contact Allmode on the contact details listed at the end of this report.**

## Chikungunya in Central America



In June 2014, El Salvador reported locally transmitted cases for the first time in Central America. Local transmission means that mosquitoes in the area have been infected with chikungunya and are spreading it to people. Local transmission of chikungunya is now being reported in other countries in Central America and as of November 24, 2014, the following Central American countries have reported cases of chikungunya:

- Belize
- Costa Rica
- El Salvador
- Guatemala
- Honduras
- Nicaragua
- Panama

If you are travelling within Central America then you are at risk of the disease and we urge that you take all necessary precautions to protect yourselves against these Mosquito bites as there is currently no vaccine or medicine to prevent the disease. You can reduce the risk of Mosquito bites following the following preventative guidelines:

- Cover exposed skin with long sleeved clothing, long trousers and hats.
- Use insect repellent as directed (products with a higher percentage of active ingredients such as Deet, Picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus or IR3535 will provide longer protection)
- Apply repellent **after** you have applied sunscreen
- Use a bed net, particularly in regards to babies and children
- Stay and sleep in screened or air conditioned rooms

### **Symptoms of the Chikungunya Virus**

**Fever**

**Joint Pain**

**Headache**

**Muscle Pain**

**Joint Swelling**

**Rash**

If you feel unwell and think you may have contacted Chikungunya then talk to your doctor or nurse, especially if you have a fever. Be sure to advise them of your travel locations. Take plenty of rest and drink plenty of fluids.



### Leishmaniasis

Leishmaniasis is a parasitic disease spread by the bite of infected sand flies. There are several different forms of leishmaniasis. The most common are cutaneous and visceral. The cutaneous type causes skin sores. The visceral type affects internal organs such as the spleen, liver, and bone marrow. People with this form usually have fever, weight loss, and an enlarged spleen and liver.

Leishmaniasis is found in parts of about 88 countries. Most of these countries are in the tropics and subtropics. It is possible but very unlikely that you would get this disease in the United States. But you should be aware of it if you are traveling to the Middle East or parts of Central America, South America, Asia, Africa or southern Europe.

Treatment is with medicines that contain antimony, a type of metal, or with strong antibiotics. The best way to prevent the disease is to protect yourself from sand fly bites:

- Stay indoors from dusk to dawn, when sand flies are the most active
- Wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts when outside

Use insect repellent and bed nets as needed

## **Malaria**



Malaria is a serious tropical disease spread by mosquitoes and is found in more than 100 countries which include Central and Southern America. If malaria is not diagnosed and treated promptly, it can be fatal. Malaria is caused by a type of parasite known as plasmodium. There are many different types of plasmodia parasites, but only five cause malaria in humans. The plasmodium parasite is mainly spread by female Anopheles mosquitoes, which predominantly bite at night. When an infected mosquito bites a human, it passes the parasites into the bloodstream.

It is important to be aware of the symptoms of malaria if you are travelling to areas where there is a high malaria risk. Symptoms usually appear between seven and 18 days after becoming infected, but in some cases the symptoms may not appear for up to a year, or occasionally even longer. A single mosquito bite is all it takes for someone to become infected.

### **Symptoms of Malaria**

**High temperature (fever)**

**Sweats and chills**

**Headache**

**Vomiting**

**Muscle Pain**

**Diarrhea**

Malaria precautions are essential. Avoid mosquito bites by covering up with clothing such as long sleeves and long trousers especially after sunset, using insect repellents on exposed skin and, when necessary, sleeping under a mosquito net.

Malaria is a serious and sometimes fatal disease transmitted by mosquitoes and as mentioned before you cannot be vaccinated against malaria. Therefore it is vital that should develop any symptoms of Malaria you should seek medical help immediately.

In Central America, malaria is the greatest risk. The disease is found in many areas of Central America, and does not just stick to rural regions. A comprehensive list is provided by the American Centre for Disease Control, breaking down at-risk areas country by country. If you're traveling to one of these areas, make sure to ask your doctor to prescribe an antimalarial drug like chloroquine. You are not recommended to purchase these drugs overseas, although they are available over the counter at many pharmacies.

## Leptospirosis



Leptospirosis exists globally, but is more common in tropical and subtropical parts of the world. The bacterium thrives in hot and humid environments and countries within Central America are reported to have one of the highest numbers of cases. It is an infectious disease caused by a type of bacteria called a spirochete. Leptospirosis can be transmitted by many animals such as rats, skunks, opossums, raccoons, foxes, and other vermin. It is transmitted though contact with infected soil or water.

People often become infected by:

- Drinking contaminated water
- Coming into contact with contaminated water or soil if they have unhealed cuts in their skin
- Their eyes, nose or mouth come into contact with contaminated water or soil
- Coming into contact with the blood of an infected animal (less common)

Humans are not commonly infected. Outbreaks may occur when there are floods. Humans rarely infect other humans, but might do so during sexual intercourse or breastfeeding.

If you are travelling in areas where leptospirosis is common, do not swim in fresh water, and only come into contact with fresh water areas if you are wearing protecting clothing. Drink sealed bottled water, or boiled fresh water. Make sure any skin lesions are covered in a waterproof dressing. If you cut yourself, clean it and bandage it immediately.

There are two main types of leptospirosis:

- **Mild Leptospirosis** - the patient experiences muscle pains, chills and possibly a headache. 90% of cases are of this type.
- **Severe Leptospirosis** - can be life-threatening. There is a risk of organ failure and internal hemorrhaging. This occurs when the bacterium infects the kidneys, liver and other major organs. Experts are not sure why some patients develop the severe form - people who are already very ill, such as those with pneumonia, young children under five, and elderly individuals are more likely to suffer from severe Leptospirosis.

Sign and symptoms of leptospirosis usually appear suddenly approx. 7 - 14 days after the person has been infected; in some cases they may appear earlier or later.

**Should you develop any symptoms it is vital that you seek medical assistance as you will need to be treated with a course of antibiotics. Severe leptospirosis can be life threatening if left untreated.**

Signs and symptoms of mild leptospirosis	Signs and symptoms of severe leptospirosis
Chills	Fatigue
Coughing	Irregular heartbeat (often accelerated)
Headaches	Pain in Chest
High fever	Nosebleeds
Muscle pain, particularly lower back and calves	Panting
Nausea	Hands, feet and ankles swell
Poor appetite	Unexplained weight loss
Red and irritated eyes	Yellowing of the whites of eyes, tongue and skin (jaundice)

Skin pain	Confusion or disorientation
Diarrhea	Drowsiness
	Fits (seizures)
	Photophobia
	Stiff neck
	Patient becomes unable to speak
	Aggressive or unusual behavior
	Coughing up blood

## Dengue Fever



Dengue fever is a disease spread to humans by mosquito bites, and is caused by one of four types of dengue viruses. It can cause severe flu-like symptoms and in severe cases can be fatal.

Symptoms of the disease will commonly appear 3 -4 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito and will include flu-like symptoms. In some cases people will have no symptoms and recover in a few days however in a small percentage of cases, dengue fever can develop into dengue hemorrhagic fever, which is also known as severe dengue. Additional symptoms will usually occur 3 – 7 days after the first symptoms.

Symptoms of Dengue Fever	Symptoms of Severe Dengue
High Fever	Decrease in Fever
Severe headache	Bleeding from nose or gums
Pain behind the eyes	Fatigue
Joint and muscle pain	Severe abdominal pain
Vomiting	Persistent vomiting
Rash	Difficulty breathing

There is no vaccine or medication that protects against dengue fever so it is important that you take steps to protect yourself from mosquito bites:

- Cover exposed skin with long sleeved clothing, long trousers and hats.
- Use insect repellent as directed (products with a higher percentage of active ingredients such as Deet, Picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus or IR3535 will provide longer protection)
- Apply repellent **after** you have applied sunscreen
- Use a bed net, particularly in regards to babies and children
- Stay and sleep in screened or air conditioned rooms

If you develop symptoms similar to dengue fever when you are travelling or after you return, see a health care provider and tell them where you have been travelling or living. Although there is no specific treatment for dengue fever, medical care can help with recovery and the control of symptoms.

Transport advice when ashore appears to be very similar in most countries across Central America.

- **TAXI**

With a high volume of 'express kidnappings' taking place across Central American countries radio taxis are highly recommended when leaving any hotels or airports; this will help to ensure that the taxi is legitimate. All taxis will have a licence plate and in some countries they will be of a certain colour, for example in Belize they have green number plates and in Nicaragua they have red.

Should you find yourself in the position where you need to hail a taxi from the street you must ensure that you note down the driver's identification number, name, colour and number of the vehicle and a photo id should be seen on the dashboard. Do not get into a taxi that is already occupied and never agree to share your taxi with a stranger and make it clear to the taxi driver that you do not want to share the taxi with anyone else even if that means paying a slightly higher fare. Be sure to agree a price before you set off.

- **BUS**

We advise that you avoid any type of local bus travel in Central America as a whole as they are normally key location points for crimes such as robbery and sexual assault. They are often overcrowded, poorly maintained and often lack seat belts or safety features. Criminal gangs have been known to stop buses in numerous countries and then rob all passengers of jewellery, money and other valuables. You are especially advised to avoid bus travel at night.

- **DRIVING**

Driving in all countries can be extremely challenging and in some cases, like Panama City, even hazardous due to heavy traffic, undisciplined driving habits, poorly maintained streets, and a shortage of effective signs and traffic signals. Due to poor lighting in many places you are strongly advised not to drive at night. Stay on main highways and toll roads wherever possible and avoid isolated roads.

Take extra care when on any mountain roads as they are known to lack safety features such as crash barriers or guard rails in many locations. This can make these roads treacherous in poor weather

Ensure that you drive with your doors and windows locked at all times. This will help to minimise the risk of a carjacking taking place when stopped at road junctions.

There have been reported incidents in a number of countries of criminals posing as traffic police to target vehicles, whereby criminals will conduct traffic stops and rob vehicle occupants at gunpoint. This can include privately owned vehicles and those owned by local hotels. Majority of these incidents occur after dark.

**For further information on Security or Intelligence please contact:**



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