

Culture Shock Costa Rica

Sometimes the shocks are positive and sometimes they are negative. Being from North America or Europe and moving to Costa Rica can be hard. Here is an interesting list of common things one is likely to encounter:

1. Upon entering a person must greet everyone in the room with a kiss and say good bye to each and every person or else one will be considered a very rude person.
2. Even if someone knows Spanish, Costa Rican's have their own dialect and their own slang so one may have trouble adjusting and understanding at first.
3. One needs to bathe at least once a day.
4. Some Costa Rican showers are metal or plastic with a bunch of wires. These are only heating the water as it comes out. One can tell when it is working because it makes a swishing sound. Be careful not to raise the arms too high or one might get a shock, literally.
5. Costa Rican's take a lot of pride in looking and smelling good. Because it is hotter people tend to sweat more. Keep clean and use baby powder, foot spray, perfumes, colognes, soap, shampoo, and mouthwash.
6. One needs to brush their teeth three times a day just as the Costa Ricans do after every meal.
7. It is not uncommon to see babies drinking coffee in their bottles or small children with their own coffee mug at afternoon coffee time.
8. Ticos love to gossip about everyone they know. Don't be surprised if they gossip about you behind your back anyways.
9. Ticos love Soap Operas especially the ones from Colombia, Mexico and even Brazil.
10. Ticos are in general short statured people; therefore, chairs, couches etc sometimes are built about 6-8 inches lower than standard US furniture.
11. Obituaries are big in newspapers and in between news segments on TV. Death is viewed in a very serious manner here and there are no wakes. Also usually people will pray 9 days after someone dies in large groups. Monthly and yearly anniversaries of one's death are commemorated with a mass and used as a time marker to decide when other important life events have occurred.
12. Getting around in Costa Rica can be challenging because there are very few street signs and even fewer addresses. All addresses are in terms of a well-known building or landmark; often the local Catholic Church, cemetery, or another fixed location. Sometimes addresses are phrased in terms of building that may not exist anymore like the old hardware store etc.
13. People will often give directions using North, South East and West and will be given in meters; however, meters usually equates to city blocks ie 100 meters would be 1 city block.
14. In every small town and area every Saturday or Sunday there is a farmer's type market where you can buy produce cheap. Many times 4 kilos of mangos cost 1000 colones or \$2 USD. Pretty sure you can't buy 1 mango in the US for that or 3 pineapples for a dollar, one in USA costs around \$7 USD.
15. When a woman is about to have her baby they always ask "cuando se mejorara?" or translated means when is she going to get better" They really know how bad pregnancy is huh?
16. If going to the immigration office or to the police station do NOT wear shorts! One will not be admitted! Shorts are considered disrespectful.
17. There are Bullfights in Costa Rica. There are also a bunch of silly and dangerous games that average people play with the bulls like the human see-saw. Additionally, there is some stiff

competition about who has the biggest, baddest, and meanest bull in the country. It makes the news here.

18. The general population is not very informed about environmental issues surprisingly. One may see people who throw trash just anywhere and many people do not recycle because it has not become convenient nor has there been educational programs set in place promoting a clean, healthy planet.
19. Refrigeration or lack thereof on certain items could be surprising. Milk, eggs, and many other items that one has been trained all their life to refrigerate, are available off the shelf (un-refrigerated) at almost every super market.
20. Also, if you venture inside many Ticos refrigerators one will find that they just put things away without covering or using containers so often that piece of sweet cake could have a little onion after bite.
21. In Tico kitchens there are usually not dishwashers or hot water at the sink. Dishes are rinsed with cold water and scrubbed with a sponge which is why when one person in a family gets sick everyone gets sick. It is not the most sanitary thing, but they seem to live a long time here so they are doing something right. Some bacteria is healthy as it builds up your immune system.
22. The word for HOT, in Spanish, is *caliente*. Caliente begins with a "C". Water faucets imported from the USA almost all have a "C" on them. If the Hot Water never seems to get HOT in Costa Rica, try the handle with the "C". Note, this may change from bathroom to bathroom within the same house.
23. Ticos love to iron everything, even underwear and especially tablecloths and napkins. Expect to look as presentable as they do.
24. You will notice that outside banks and high end stores guards that are very heavily armed.
25. Pedestrians must be very careful they do not have the right of way. No one will stop for them so do not risk it and always look everyway to be sure. Especially be careful of the speedy motorcycles.
26. At 7 AM every morning, most if not all Costa Rica radio stations broadcast the exact same program. It begins with the Costa Rican National Anthem and provides the government and other authorized entities a way to send messages or information nationwide.
27. The meter in a taxicab is known as the Maria. There are bunches of dishonest cabbies trying to rip off foreigners so stay on guard and be educated.
28. Costa Ricans call speed bumps "muertos" which translated into dead people.
29. The big yellow hearts with halos painted in the streets are painted there when someone has lost their life in an accident. The government department MOPT does this to remind people to be cautious and slow down in these places.
30. Ticos are obsessed with soccer aka futbol if there is a game on; everyone will be watching, especially if it is the national team La Sele. These are usually the best times to run errands as no one is in the streets.
31. If there is no topic for discussion with Ticos one is always welcome to talk about soccer or the latest news or gossip.
32. When one goes to the gas station, they will notice that one does not pump the gas there are specialized employees for that. They are usually nice enough to clean the windshield, check the air in the tires, and check the oil. No one is obligated to give them anything extra for this service, but they sure do appreciate it.