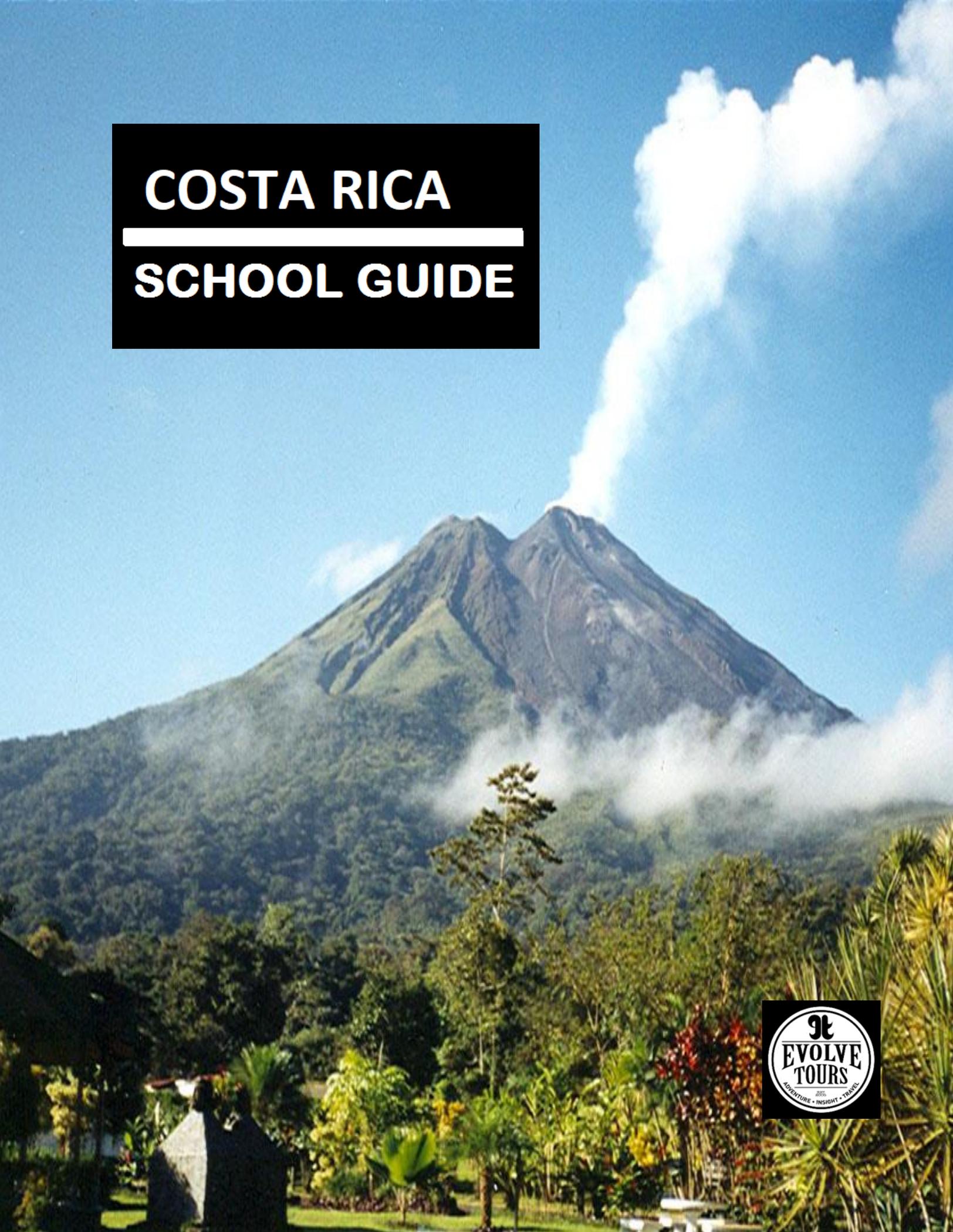


COSTA RICA

SCHOOL GUIDE



How to plan the perfect student trip to Costa Rica

Brought to you by Evolve Tours

Welcome! Evolve Tours has designed this guide as a helpful resource for those interested in planning a trip for their students to Costa Rica. In the following pages, you'll discover how to decide on the type of trip for you, the right destination, some of the activities your students can enjoy in Costa Rica, where to sleep, where to eat, an explanation of travel insurance, travel tips and more. Our goal is to make the trip planning process as seamless and as stress free for you and your colleagues as possible.

Why should my student group visit Costa Rica?

A trip to Costa Rica can be a fascinating educational and cultural experience for students. Considering the various destinations of potential trips can seem overwhelming at first. The first is to determine the intended focus of the educational trip, after which you can then decide which type of trip best suit what you and your group are looking to experience. For example:

Biology- Show your science students the incredible biodiversity of this country, by having them participate in meaningful field research.

Language - Are you a Spanish language teacher who would love for your students to improve their skills? By Interacting, Costa Rica will have them speaking like the locals in no time.

Outdoor Adventure- Do you want your students to experience both ancient history, and outdoor activities? Try an adventure tour trekking and hiking the volcanos.

Community Service – Want to make an impact with your travels? There are a number of opportunities that offer a chance to put some volunteer hours to good use while being immersed in a rural Costa Rican community.

Mixed focus- A balance of cultural activities, outdoor activities, and community service based. The variety of geography, culture and history of Costa Rica makes for a well-rounded trip.



Costa Rica is a fantastic destination for students of the following subjects: Geography, Biology, History, Spanish Language, Outdoor Education, Science, Social Studies, Philosophy, World Religion and more! Whatever subject your student group is interested in, Costa Rica is sure to be a great destination for your students.

What time of the year should my student group visit Costa Rica?

Weather and Climate

Costa Rica is a destination that can be enjoyed almost year-round. September and October are the only months to be avoided. The country's climate is split into 2 different seasons: the dry season runs from November through to May, and sees plenty of sun and warm weather in the majority of the country. The exception being the Caribbean coastline, where you may experience a tropical shower at any time of year. The wet season begins at the end of May, but it is still possible to enjoy the country's many beautiful attractions with minimal disruption right through until the end of August.



Trip Length

Most Costa Rica trips are 7 to 12 days long, though trip length varies depending on countries visiting, activities planned and budget.

Check the following links for more information about Costa Rican weather throughout the year and some tips on deciding when to travel.

<https://weatherspark.com/y/15463/Average-Weather-in-San-Jos%C3%A9-Costa-Rica>

<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/costa-rica>

What are The Best Student-Friendly Activities in Costa Rica?

Check out this list for some of Evolve Tour's favourite and most popular activities for school groups in Costa Rica:

White Water Rafting – Savegre River- The Savegre is one of the best rivers for rafting in the world. Before paddling, safety and other on-river skills and instructions need to be taught. Maneuver the rapids and take a side hike to layered waterfalls to discover this natural beauty. Travel down river in the rafts until you reach the coast.

Zip lining and Surfing – Hermosa Beach – Enjoy the fun and adventurous part of traveling to Costa Rica.





Parque Nacional Manuel Antonio- Puntarenas Province- discover the beautiful rainforest on Costa Rica’s central pacific coast. Discover the vast amounts of tropical plants and wildlife including the capuchin monkeys.

Volcán Arenal & hot springs- Parque Nacional Volcán Arenal- take a hike and discover this stunning volcano as the natural wonders of the Costa Rica.

La Fortuna Waterfall- Alajuela Province- short but strenuous hike to see the beauty of the falls and take a sunset dip in the water.

Community Service work- various remote communities- participate in sustainable, locally supported service projects. Participate in different workshops such as: chocolate making, natural medicine, animal husbandry, tree planting, appropriate technology, natural building and fermentation, artisanal/cultural.

For more information about the above attractions and more, visit:

<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/costa-rica/top-things-to-do/a/poi/358221>

Should I work with a travel company?

Our next step is deciding whether you will plan the trip on your own, or use the help of a student travel provider. Some teachers are used to planning the trip themselves, but many enjoy the less stressful and time consuming route of hiring a travel company that will expertly take care of all the pre-trip planning. To make the decision easier, we’ve made some comparison charts, comparing the pros and cons of doing a trip on your own vs. with a tour provider.

ON YOUR OWN

Pros	Cons
✓ Cheaper	✗ A lot of stressful planning. Organizing the hotels, transportation, meals, activities and more.
✓ Plan exactly what you want, without sticking to a schedule	✗ Missing out on professional, time-tested itineraries.
	✗ No on-ground tour director with local knowledge who oversees the trip.

WITH A TOUR COMPANY

Pros	Cons
<p>✓ Having a guide(s) with local knowledge. As with any form of travel, whether it be museum hopping or outdoor activities, you're bound to learn more, gain a greater understanding of the local community, and just get more out of the whole experience when following a knowledgeable expert.</p>	<p>✗ Set itinerary: although some travel companies like Evolve Tours are flexible and dedicated to customizing their trips, many others offer no customization.</p>
<p>✓ Safety and Security- A travel provider will ensure all supplier companies (restaurants, hotels, activities) are safe, reputable and provide quality services. As well, emergency protocols and first-aid trained tour staff.</p>	
<p>✓ No details to worry about! You're free to focus fully on the ride, and have someone else sweat over the small, yet paramount details.</p>	<p>✗ Generally, planning with a tour company is more expensive than doing it on your own.</p>
<p>✓ Allergy, food restrictions communicated to all the suppliers (hotels, restaurants and activities)</p>	
<p>✓ Group rates on transportation and accommodation since they work with suppliers year round with many student groups</p>	
<p>✓ Years of expertise</p>	

How to choose the perfect student travel company

(Adapted from "How to Choose a Reputable Adventure Travel Company or Guide" at <http://gadling.com/2011/08/05/a-guide-to-choosing-adventure-travel-companies-and-guides/>)

There are many student travel companies nationwide that run trips to Costa Rica. Not all are created equal. There are some key things you should look for when choosing a company to plan and run your student trip. Check out the following tips on what to look for or avoid.





Reputation and Safety

A brief online search will bring to light any serious breaches in safety or conduct. Safety doesn't just apply to those who plan to scale the Andes or kayak the Zambezi. Even the tamest "adventures" require guides who are knowledgeable about the area and activity. Make sure you have someone on hand that is currently certified in emergency first aid and rescue procedure and ensure that the company has emergency protocols and risk management policies in place and that the truly value safety over all else.

Client Communication

How clear and accurate is the company's literature or website? How long does it take them to respond to your emails or phone calls? A few days is standard, but if you find yourself having to follow up repeatedly, move on. A reputable travel company will detail exactly what is included and what is not for the price. All services should be clearly spelled out and agreed upon.

Customized Itineraries

A legitimate student travel provider will have trip itineraries that they have successfully run time and time again. They know what works and developed what they believe to be a flawless itinerary. However, there is a big plus when finding a travel company who is flexible with their itineraries. Find someone who will work with you to create the best possible custom itinerary for your group's needs.

Guide qualifications

Are their guides knowledgeable about the region you are visiting? Do they have experience leading trips there? Ideal guides will have experience travelling in the cities you are visiting and will be energetic, informative, entertaining and organized.

Ask for referrals

We suggest asking a tour company for referrals of other schools who they have run Costa Rica trips before. You can also look at reviews on sites like TripAdvisor.com, or search travel blogs.

"In the end, sometimes it just comes down to how comfortable a person feels with the company and their interactions with them."

What kind of accommodations should student group stay in while in Costa Rica?

When choosing where your group will stay, it's important to keep a few factors in mind. Depending on your group, some factors may be more important than others. For example: location and proximity to activities, price, room types and sizes or youth hostels vs. hotels, or volunteer housing.

Hotels *More expensive. Private rooms, full amenities, around the clock hotel staff. Typically 2/3 students to a room.*

Browse Costa Rican hotels here: https://www.tripadvisor.ca/Hotels-g291982-Costa_Rica-Hotels.html

Hostels *Cheaper. Can request private rooms for the school group. Anywhere from 2-8 students in a room, often with a bunk bed setup. May have private bathrooms, or shared bathrooms on the floor. Youth hostels can range greatly, from very basic to high quality hotel type accommodations.*

Browse Costa Rican hostels, here: <http://www.hostelworld.com/accommodation/Costa-Rica>

Volunteer Housing *Many School groups visiting Costa Rica plan to include an aspect of community service or a cultural exchange. During these legs of the tours, your school group could be staying a wide range of accommodations, from a ranch or farm, to homestays with local families. Therefore, quality of accommodations will vary greatly.*



What are the best student-friendly restaurants in Costa Rica?

The most important thing when deciding on a restaurant for your student group is making sure the venue can accommodate a large number of people. There should be plenty of options for students to choose from. Ensure the restaurant knows about any allergies or dietary restrictions your students may have. For large groups, it is best to reserve well in advance and not leave it until the night of. Breakfast is often included at hotels, and a light breakfast at hostels. This will vary, so ensure to check with your accommodation when booking. For lunch, we recommend giving students free time in a popular area with many options to choose from.

What kind of transportation should we take while in Costa Rica?

The best combination of transportation for your student trip to Costa Rica will depend on a number of factors, such as number of destination cities, distance apart, budget, group size etc.

Plane

Of course, you will be initially travelling to Costa Rica on a southbound flight. If you are planning on visiting multiple cities over a long distance, flying is the fastest option and allows the most time to spend in each destination. However, this is the more expensive option. Remember, you will have to arrange inner city transportation as well.

Private Coach Bus

The most popular option for student groups who plan on visiting multiple cities is renting a coach bus. This is the most economical method for large groups, and you can rent the coach for the duration of the tour to use for transportation between cities as well as within cities between activities. Coach buses and their amenities will depend on the company, your group size, budget and more.



Can my student group use Public Transport in Costa Rica?

Public transit networks in Costa Rica are much less extensive, developed, or frequent as their counterparts in North America or Europe. The most common form of public transportation in Costa Rica is bus travel. It is not recommended to rely on public transport for moving your student group, especially in more rural areas. Rather, rent a coach bus or van and ensure you have a local driver you knows the region well.

Should we purchase Travel Insurance?

Purchasing the correct travel insurance can help in the event someone becomes sick or injured before, or during, a trip. Most travel insurance providers' coverage includes cancellation, trip interruption, and lost baggage. If families purchase travel insurance and the student falls ill before the trip, they may receive reimbursement for costs paid towards the trip. You can either order insurance for everyone in the group and include this in the trip cost, or provide it as an optional addition to families who would like to purchase.

Visa and Entry requirements

Many countries around the world have visa requirements and other restrictions on traveling. Before you travel, it is important to do your research. Some countries it may take up to 3 months to get a travel visa, so make sure you check out requirements as soon as you've selected your destination(s)!

Here are a couple of great resources on entry requirements for countries around the world:

Visa HQ: <https://www.visahq.ca/>

Select your country of citizenship and then the site will update the country list with requirements for your citizenship. Make sure you click on the country/countries you're visiting to get complete information (such as passport validity requirements).

Project Visa: <http://www.projectvisa.com/>

Simply select the country you're traveling to and then read the information provided.

Vaccinations

Depending on the area you're traveling to it may be wise to get vaccinated against disease.

One of the best resources for health-related information and vaccination advice for travelers is the **Centre for Disease Control (CDC) website**. Their site gives country and region-specific information for travelers like common diseases, recommended vaccinations and tips on preventing common travelling illness. For the best and most-up-to date information, we recommend you visit a local travel clinic and speak to a doctor about your specific trip details like the areas you are going to and the type of traveling you're doing.

Your Next Steps to Making this Dream Student Trip a Reality!

1. Deciding on working with a tour company, or commit to organizing the trip on your own
2. Promote the trip!
 - Send letter home to parents, make announcements, tell you colleagues, put up posters (available from Evolve Tours) and think creatively to get the word out!
3. Hold a Parent information night
4. Distribute a Registration package to students- Waivers, Packing lists, other forms
5. Decide on a payment schedule
6. Collect deposits, registration package and payments
7. Complete rooming lists and other lists
8. Finally, board the bus or train and get the show on the road!





Evolve Tours

At Evolve Tours, we've been running student trips around the world since 2006 and have been perfecting the trip planning process ever since. After deciding you want your students to experience educational travel, there's a lot involved in organizing a trip before hopping on that bus. There's the logistics of accommodations, transportation, meals, activities and more- when planned properly they come together to ensure an incredible and memorable student trip.

If you have any questions about any of the content in this guide, please email us at info@evolvetours.com, or call us at 1.888.222.5066 (Toll Free)

You can also check out sample itineraries of our trips online at www.evolvetours.com

We'd be happy to work together to plan your student trip, or just talk travel!

Happy Travels!

Evolve Tours

DISCLAIMER: The information found in this guide is for research purposes only. It does not constitute actual travel advice nor a contract between Evolve Tours and the reader of this material. It was written solely for the purpose of providing free, quality information for the public domain. These manuals are updated from time to time, however some information contained herein may become outdated. It is up to the reader of this material to do other research to verify its accuracy; or contract the services of Evolve Tours or another licensed travel provider who can provide the most up to date and accurate recommendations for travel. Thank you for reading the fine print. You get a gold star on your homework.