

COSTA RICA CULTURAL NOTES

COSTA RICA CULTURAL NOTES CONTENTS

Greetings and Addresses	1
Tico Time	1
Family	1
Gender Issues	2
Piropos/Cat Calls	2
Water	2
Toilets	2
Walking & Using Public Transit	2

GREETINGS AND ADDRESSES

- Always shake hands when you meet an acquaintance.
- It is also acceptable for women to kiss friends (men and women) on the cheek. Two men will generally shake hands.
- It is polite to use titles (Señora, Profesor, etc) and to use the “Usted” form.

TICO TIME

Traditionally, Ticos tend to be more relaxed about the concept of time than people are in the U.S. This attitude has become known as “Tico Time”. Students notice this most frequently with travel itineraries, particularly departure and returning hours, and when meeting Tico friends.

There is a sense that what you are doing at the present is important, particularly if you are spending time with a person, and that things planned for later will be taken care of later. It is not uncommon for a friend to show up 30 minutes after an agreed-upon meeting time, or for a party to begin two hours later than announced. It could be considered rude to arrive on time if invited to a friend’s house for dinner.

The more relaxed time concept **does not apply** in academic or business situations, such as class or a meeting with a professor, or arriving for an internship. In these situations, and other more formal business settings, punctuality is expected.

FAMILY

Family plays an important role in Costa Rican culture. The extended family is often a very large, close circle of relatives and friends. It is not unusual for children to live with parents until they marry, or to continue to live with parents if they never marry. Your host family may include several generations in one house.

COSTA RICA CULTURAL NOTES

GENDER ISSUES

Women in Costa Rica have made great gains toward equality. They make up 50% of the student body at all educational levels up to the university and are better represented in professional roles than in most other Latin American countries.

Traditional family roles, although not as pronounced as in the past, are still apparent. The man is generally the authority figure and main provider, while the woman, even if she works outside the home, is usually responsible for running the household and caring for the children.

As you interact with Costa Ricans your age, you may become aware that social rules and etiquette are stricter for women than for men. You may notice that Costa Rican women rarely drink very much, and they almost never go to clubs or bars alone.

U.S. women are stereotyped in Costa Rica as being sexually available. Behavior outside of Costa Rican norms, such as going to or leaving a club alone or with someone you just met, having several drinks, or flirting openly with local men may indicate to them that you fit this stereotype. For your safety, follow the Costa Rican social norms when going out.

PIROPOS/CAT CALLS

Piropos (catcalls) are a fact of life for women in Costa Rica. Although they may be described as "harmless" at one level, they often feel degrading or threatening, particularly to women from cultures where this behavior is not widely accepted.

This article describes a 2015 attempt to have such behavior declared a crime and shows that many Costa Rica women find the behavior offensive, also:

<https://qcostarica.com/proposal-to-ban-piropos-failed-to-obtain-legislative-support/>

WATER

Water is a precious resource in Costa Rica. Most Costa Ricans take a shower every morning, and you can, too—but it should be short, both to conserve water and to keep the bathroom as free as possible. If you can't figure out how to use the hot water, just ask!

TOILETS

In Costa Rica, as in many parts of Central and South America, you can't flush toilet paper down the toilet. Plumbing pipes are typically only one inch in diameter, rather than the two inches used in the U.S. There will be a garbage can next to the toilet for toilet paper. **Throw toilet paper in the garbage can, not in the toilet!** This takes some getting used to, but after a few weeks, it will become habit.

WALKING & USING PUBLIC TRANSIT

- Pedestrians never have the right of way—be careful when crossing the street!

COSTA RICA CULTURAL NOTES

- Visiting students usually notice that there are no pollution controls for vehicles, buses, industry, etc. With the advent of eco-tourism, Costa Rica is becoming more environmentally conscious.
- Agree on a price before you get into a cab, or you may be charged a high rate. Also ask if the driver has a taxi meter (known as a Maria)—if not, look for another taxi, as the rate could be set arbitrarily.