

Your Journey to Banana Azul & Casa Sol y Arena

I like to think the journey begins once you book the trip. To get well prepared for that journey, I invite you to check out some of the websites below where you can post questions and get feedback from other travelers to Costa Rica and Puerto Viejo area.

- <http://PuertoViejoSatellite.com> Tons of information on Puerto Viejo including a forum where you can go for additional questions
- <http://discoverypress.com/CostaRica/> Full of expats. Some too conservative for my liking ;-). But many are very helpful in recommending travel help.
- <http://thorntree.lonelyplanet.com/categories.cfm?catid=12> My favourite. Good advice from experienced travelers. Great for budget to middle of the road travel.
- <http://forums.arcr.net/> Good if you are thinking of moving here;
- <http://www.travelblog.org/Central-America-Caribbean/Costa-Rica/> Another good one.

Here are a couple that give good overviews, but do not have forums.

- <http://www.GreenCoast.com> for local area of Puerto Viejo
- <http://www.TheRealCostaRica.com> Very good site that gives a good overview.

**“A good traveler has no fixed plans....
and is not intent upon arriving” - TAO**



General Tips – Costa Rica is a great place for a vacation and well over 1 million people visit this small country every year. But please note that Costa Rica is a *developing* country and not a fully *developed* country. This means among many things, things will not be the same as in North America (Europeans usually never complain ;-). So, expect things like bad roads, lack of signs, crazy drivers etc etc.

Another reality of traveling in developing countries (some more than others) is crime. Costa Rica has its share of crime against tourists (almost all non-violent). I do not say this to scare you, but only to be realistic and take certain precautions so you will limit yourself to the possibility of being a victim. Here are just a few general tips while traveling in Costa Rica.

- Watch your bags very carefully in Bus Stations and at bus stops. Do not leave bags unattended. In fact, I sometimes sit with my leg through a strap of my back pack when I am in bus stations.
- If bags are in overhead on bus, do leave them unattended during road stop if you get off bus. If bags are underneath, make sure you watch both carry-on and larger luggage while getting off bus. Most thieves know the “good stuff” is in the carry-on.
- Be wary of people offering to carry your stuff for money. This always happens when you get off busses. If they do handle your bags, they expect a tip. 200 colones (50 cents is usually enough)
- Careful of people (especially locals), that are overly friendly and start recommending other hotels etc. They do not usually do this out of the goodness of their heart. They usually get a commission.
- Do not leave bags unattended in your car. Also always make sure your car is not parked out on street overnight unless you feel it is secure.
- When parking in city areas on street, there is usually a person on the street (they wear orange vests) that will watch your car. They are worth every colone. I will usually give them 200colones when I park and another 200 colones when I return (total 80 cents). This is usually double what locals pay, but I can have never had anyone take anything out of my car, and the guy will many times even stop traffic to allow me to pull out safely ☺
- Try and carry lots of small bills. This will help prevent people from thinking you have lots of money and many do not have change. Also do not let people see in your wallet. Many places also have a problem with having enough change for a 10,000 colone (approx \$20.) note.
- Try and pay with local currency where possible. Paying with dollars is a sure way to get short-changed on exchange and shows other people you are “green” at traveling in CR. Before you complain about having to pay in local currency, ask yourself if the country you come from if the shops and restaurants would be happy to accept foreign currencies ;-)

Airport Arrival; First of all it is important you have a valid passport. You do not need a Visa to enter Costa Rica from most countries. If you are unsure, please contact the Costa Rican consulate in your country.

Taxi – The San Jose airport has no indoor public areas. All people waiting for arrivals and all taxis and tour operators have to wait outside the main exit door.

When you get out of secured area, there will no doubt people trying to sell you a ride to your hotel or anywhere else in Costa Rica. These are usually unauthorized people and unless you are used to negotiating with these people, we do not recommend you travel with them. Chances are it will be no cheaper than using one of the Orange Airport Taxis. If you do choose to use these people (pirate taxis) make sure you negotiate rate ahead of time or that they have a meter in their car that is on.

Just ignore these people and go right out front get one of the Orange Airport Taxis. They will get you to where ever you need to go. Cost is about \$20 to San Jose hotels.

Airport Pickup and go right to Banana Azul – We have a shuttle company that can meet you after customs which a sign with your name on it and take you directly to Banana Azul. The driver is there just for you so you can stop as you like for photos, meal breaks, etc. The cost is \$160 or \$190 (depending on date) for the approximately 5 hour journey and the van will comfortably accommodate up to 8 people and luggage.

If you'd like us to book this for you, click [here \(have your flight information handy\)](#)

If your flight arrives early in the morning, you may also be able to get the morning shared shuttle service that will bring you right to Banana Azul for \$35-39 per person. See Tourist Buses below.

Public Bus – For adventurous and more seasoned travelers, I recommend the public bus. Just ignore all the taxis and walk out on to street right in front of airport terminal. You will see a public transit stand. Almost every bus there is heading to downtown San Jose. Make sure you ask the driver. The cost is about 65-75 cents. If you have no colones yet, give them 1 US dollar.

Tell the driver where you are going and “hopefully” he will drop you off at the closest spot. Then get in a taxi (they are usually red) and get local taxi to take you to your hotel or bus station. Make sure meter is on. It is known in Costa Rica as “Maria”. The absolute most it should be for anywhere in downtown is \$5.

Driving/Rental Cars – Most rental cars will arrange to pick you up at airport or have a shuttle bus for the bigger companies.

Please note there is a company that I recommend <http://www.renta4x4incostarica.com/> They rent only Geo Tracker 4 x 4 and have one rate of \$35/day (all inclusive). We do not receive a commission from these people (or any other service, tour, hotel, restaurant etc). We recommend them because we feel it is best value for your dollar with the least chance of additional charges that car rental companies are so famous for.

The car rental company will give you a map and there are signs on how to get to downtown San Jose.

Driving to Puerto Viejo is really easy (except for road conditions at times). You will have to find the highway to Limon. It has easy access from downtown and once you are on that highway, it is almost impossible to get lost. *Please note: If you have not left San Jose by 2:00pm in afternoon, you will be driving part of the way at night. We do not recommend this for first time travelers in driving in Costa Rica. Roads do not have lines. Rain can be bad and there are potholes and people walking/cycling that you can not see very well.*

You will first go through the mountains and will be very high up. It is likely that you will encounter fog (clouds) and rain. Please drive with your lights on. Half of the local drivers do not.

The drive through the mountains is beautiful. You will see many vistas and real rain forest jungle. As you are about to exit mountains into flat land (just after a bunch of ugly billboards) there is a restaurant on your right (usually with many trucks out front). It is called **El Yugo** and it is a very good local restaurant. In fact the many times I have driven this route, it is the best I have found. It is also a good break after about 1.5 hours into the trip.

The road from there to Limon (approx 2 hrs) is practically straight with no hills. It is small towns and banana plantations. Please note there are many trucks as Limon is a port city and this is the truck route. Also note, you will see a sign or 2 for Puerto Viejo on the way to Limon. This is not the correct Puerto Viejo. You have to reach Limon and drive down coast. (also note on this stretch, there are many speed traps and local cops love foreigners as it can mean a free lunch)

When you hit Limon, just before you enter city centre you will see a sign (at the Texaco Station) where you turn right to go to Puerto Viejo. If you need gas, this is a good place

to get it. There are no “legal” gas stations in Puerto Viejo. From that sign you just follow the coast all the way down (approx 1 hour). The drive is beautiful (but mind the pot holes)

After about 1 hour of driving, you will come to the little town of Hone Creek. At that point you are about 5 kilometers from the turn off to [Banana Azul](#) and [Casa Sol y Arena](#). You will drive past a hardware store called San Francisco. A few hundred meters past the hardware store is a bus stop with a roof on it. At the bus stop take a left and follow along beach. 5 houses down along beach is [Casa Sol y Arena](#).

And to get to [Banana Azul](#) you just proceed past [Casa Sol y Arena](#) along beach until you come to Perla Negra Hotel. Banana Azul is 200 meters past Perla Negra Hotel and has a green gate.

See Puerto Viejo Map here: <http://puertoviejosatellite.com/>

Public Bus to Puerto Viejo – Take a taxi to Caribe Bus Station. Note there are 3 main terminals in San Jose and it is very important you go to Caribbean Station. At Caribe Station, you go to ticket counter behind all food outlets. You ask then for ticket to Puerto Viejo [Talamanca](#). Please note there is another Puerto Viejo in Siquierres and you do not want that bus. Ticket cost is approx \$9.

There are 5 buses a day (6:00 am, 10:00 am, 12 noon, 2:00 pm & 4:00 pm). There is one stop just outside of Limon for a pee-and-drink break). Count on needing at least 2 hours from plane arrival to go through customs and get a taxi from airport to bus station. For example; If your plane arrives at 12:30 in the day time, you will have to look at catching 4:00 pm bus.

Detailed bus schedules (including how to do the trip via Limon) are available at www.PuertoViejoSatellite.com/transport.php#bus

Take bus right into town of Puerto Viejo (final stop), there will be taxis waiting to offer you a ride. The maximum cost should be \$4 to Banana Azul or Casa Sol y Arena. It is a light 20-30 minute walk if you can manage your luggage ok. (Note: negotiate cab rate before getting in as all cars here have no meters). Just give them instructions as above.

Tourist Buses – They are small air-conditioned buses and cost anywhere from \$35- \$39 pp each way. They will pick you up (hotel/airport) and deliver you to our door. They can be really great when you are tight for airport times.

We can book those for you; just fill in the information on this form: https://secure.puertoviejosatellite.com/transport_res.php?propid=interbus

For the Truly Adventurous – Does the thought of a white water rafting trip on the way down or return from Puerto Viejo do it for you? We can arrange a tour bus pick you up in San Jose, take you to the Pacuare River in Siquierres, go on a 4 hour rafting trip which includes lunch and drop off at our place in Puerto Viejo.

We can book the rafting trip for you too, the link for the booking form is: https://secure.puertoviejosatellite.com/tour_reserve.php?tid=rpac1d

I am sorry if all this seems a bit much, but I just wanted to try and give people as much info as possible. Many people seem to have much anxiety about getting here. Just relax. It's easy.

This list is by no means complete and if you feel there are things are missing or incorrect, please let me know.

Cheers, Colin and Roberto.

www.BananaAzul.com