

I. Basic Facts

A. Time Zones GMT -6 hours

B. Currency Costa Rica colon, 1 colon = 100 centimos  
1 US\$ = 84 colones

(1 March 1990; for current exchange rate,  
consult UNHCR Finance Section)

C. Visa Information/  
Vaccination Requirements

Visa Information: For holders of a UN laissez-passer, a visa is  
obligatory. Applications from UN staff  
members in Geneva are processed by the United  
Nations of Geneva.

For holders of national passports, a limited  
number of nationalities are exempt from the  
visa requirement. There are no restrictions  
on travel within the country.

Vaccination  
Requirements: No vaccinations are mandatory. The UN Joint  
Medical Service recommends vaccination against  
tetanus and poliomyelitis. For first time  
visitors, protection against hepatitis (gamma  
globulin injection) is recommended. Water  
precautions are recommended as well. Consult  
the UN Joint Medical Service for further  
details.

Source: Vaccination Certificate Requirement,  
WHO 1988.

D. Calendar and Holidays

New Year's Day	1 January
St. Joseph's Day	19 March
Easter (variable)	March/April
Maundy Thursday	March/April
Good Friday	March/April
Anniversary of the Battle of Rivas	11 April
Labour Day	1 May
Corpus Christi (variable)	May/June
SS Peter and Paul	29 June
Anniversary - Annexation Guanacaste Province	25 July

Our Lady of the Angeles	2 August
Ascension	15 August
Independence	15 September
Day of the Americas	12 October
All Souls Day	2 November
Immaculate Conception	8 December
Christmas Day	25 December

Additional local holidays are observed in San José, Limón, and other major cities.

#### E. History

Christopher Columbus landed on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica in 1502. The country was under Spanish colonial rule from 1522 until 1821 when it joined other countries in the region in a declaration of independence and became part of the short-lived Central American Federation. Costa Rica became an independent Republic in 1838. The country's long tradition of democracy began in 1889. Since this time, there have been only two brief attempts to seize power. In 1917, there was a military coup to establish Federico Tinoco Granados as President. Tinoco stepped down in 1920 and another free election was held. In 1948, Rafael Angel Calderón Guardia, whose own Presidential administration of 1940-1944 had instituted the first social and economic reforms in the country, instigated the annulment of Presidential elections when his hand-picked candidate lost. From the ensuing civil war emerged José Figueres Ferrer, who guided the junta which ruled the country for 18 months while it hammered out the framework of democratic institutions that have remained the foundation of Costa Rican political life. A new constitution of 1949 abolished the Army, and guaranteed equality before the law, freedom of speech, assembly, press, and organisation. In November 1983, concerned by the military activity in Nicaragua, an official proclamation of neutrality was made, by which Costa Rica would not be used as a base for attack against its neighbours. In 1985, Oscar Arias Sanchez was elected President.

Source: Europe Yearbook 1986.

F. Government

Political Status: Republic under a President elected by direct popular vote for a four year period.

Structure: Parliamentary elections take place every four years. The President and the 57 deputies in the Parliament cannot be re-elected. The electoral process is supervised by the powerful Supreme Electoral Tribunal. Executive power is vested in a president who is the centre of power.

Judicial System: Ultimate judicial power is vested in the Supreme Court. There are also four appellate courts, criminal courts, civil courts, and special courts.

Regional Organization: Costa Rica comprises seven provinces. These are divided into cantons which are further divided into districts. Within the canton administration, authority is vested in a municipal council.

G. Languages

The official language is Spanish. English is widely spoken in some areas. There are five national languages of Indian origin.

H. Religion

Roman Catholicism is the predominant faith in Costa Rica and is the official religion. An estimated 95% of the population belongs to the Roman Catholic Church. All forms of worship are tolerated.

Source: Europe Yearbook 1986; OFDA Country Profile of Costa Rica, USAID, Washington DC, 1987.

I. Disaster Vulnerability

Among the disasters to which Costa Rica is vulnerable are earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, landslides, flooding, drought, forest fires, deforestation and environmental degradation, and the strain placed on governmental resources by refugees and illegal aliens.

- Earthquake:** Costa Rica is susceptible to large subduction quakes as well as shallow, but very hazardous, plate-edge type temblors. With the population heavily concentrated in the Valle Central, even a small, shallow temblor could cost many lives and devastate the economy by destroying crucial infrastructure and industry concentrated in the cities. For example, only a few major aqueducts provide water for the population centres and these cross fault lines.
- Volcanicity:** Seven historically active volcanoes exist within the cordilleras of Guanacaste and Central, two of which have been active for hundreds of years. Two other volcanoes have been classified as fumarolic, or steaming with measurable subsurface temperatures. Unlike earthquake incidents which inflict immediate destruction, the effects of a volcanic eruption can be seen for years after the occurrence. The enormous ash eruptions not only adversely affect agricultural production throughout the country for several years, but kill people and wildlife, and contaminate rivers. The threat to human life is increased by the richness of volcanic soil which acts as a magnet for agricultural activity - a danger the government attempts to minimize by claiming such land as government property.
- Landslides:** Landslides in Costa Rica are triggered by a number of events, usually volcanic activity, earthquakes, heavy rains, or a combination of all three. Continual seismic activity, deforestation, and the development of road systems and other infrastructure make Cartago and San José particular targets for damage resulting from devastating landslides.
- Flooding:** Flooding is the most frequent disaster in Costa Rica, and one which affects the most people. It is often accompanied by landslides. The increasing use of floodplains for economic activity and human settlement exacerbates the effects of annual flooding. Destruction of natural watersheds as a result of rapid and unregulated deforestation will increase the occurrence of flooding.
- Drought:** Droughts are rare in Costa Rica, although Guanacaste Province suffers a dry season from November to April which brings water scarcity. Droughts in this region have caused destruction to agricultural and livestock production.

Deforestation  
and Environmental  
Degradation:

The link between environmental degradation and increased occurrences of natural disasters has been widely acknowledged. Deforestation causes erosion of topsoil, falling river levels, and flooding. In turn, flooding causes landslides and washed-out roads.

Hurricanes:

Hurricanes originating in the Caribbean present a sporadic threat to Costa Rica, as evidenced by the havoc wrought by Hurricane Joan in October 1988.

Illegal Aliens:

In 1988, experts estimated that up to 150,000 illegal aliens resided in Costa Rica. Central American refugees and illegal aliens have replaced blacks as the largest minority group in a matter of only seven years. The group now represents 6% of the population. The effect on Costa Rica is to strain the nation's health budget, exacerbate unemployment, and create pockets of illiteracy untouched by the Government's extensive education programme. While the Government receives assistance from UNHCR and other non-governmental groups in supporting refugees, no assistance is provided to the illegal aliens.

J. Population

Ethnic and  
Socio-Cultural  
Groups:

Costa Ricans are very homogeneous, both ethnically and socially. They take great pride in their nationality, as demonstrated in the common use of the term Ticos, the affectionate self-appellation by which citizens of the country are known. The indigenous population numbers around 20,000. Blacks constitute an English-speaking minority of some 30,000, concentrated around Puerto Limón on the Caribbean Coast.

Density:

Over half of the Costa Rican population is concentrated on only 5% of the national territory. The San José Metropolitan area - comprising the cities of San José, Alajuela, Heredia, and Cartago - has become the most densely populated area in the country. In 1984, 48% of the population lived in urban areas and 52% in rural regions. While Costa Rica is the second most urbanized country in Central America, it is considered much less so than Mexico and most of South America. Costa Rica, however, has not been exempt from the strains of rapid urbanization. Migration to

urban centres continues at a rapid pace, often outstripping the ability of city planners and local governments to provide adequate housing, employment, and municipal services.

Demographics:	Total population (1984 census)	2,460,226
	Density per square km	48.0
	Life Expectancy - males	71 years
	females	76 years
	Average population growth rate (1980-1985)	2.8%

Population by Province and Capital City

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<u>Province</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Population of Capital City*</u>
San José	893,254	245,370
Alajuela	430,634	33,929
Puntarenas	291,008	47,851
Cartago	269,860	23,884
Heredia	195,389	20,867
Guancaste	193,024	14,093 (Liberia)
Limón	187,057	43,158
National	2,460,226	429,152 San José

\* Unless indicated otherwise, the capital city bears the same name as the province.

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Social Structure:	In 1983, the age of the Costa Rican population was structured as follows:
	Under 15 ..... 37%
	15 to 64 ..... 59%
	65 and older ..... 4%

Source: Europe Yearbook, 1986; Government of Costa Rica, Dirección General de Estadísticos y Censos; and the World Bank, World Development Report 1986.

K. Climate and Geography

Area: 51,100 square kilometres situated between Nicaragua to the north and Panama in the south.

Geographical Overview: Costa Rica can be divided into three geographically diverse regions - the interior cordilleras, the Caribbean lowlands, and the Pacific littoral.

Interior Cordilleras: The republic's most notable topographical feature is its rocky central region. A series of mountain ranges, or cordilleras, traverses the country running northwest to southeast. The major interconnecting chains include:

- 1) Cordillera de Guanacaste: the northernmost range dotted with volcanic massifs.
- 2) Cordillera de Tilaran: separated from the Guanacaste chain by Laguna de Arenal.
- 3) Cordillera Central: includes the densely populated Valle Central and four volcanic massifs.
- 4) Cordillera de Talamanca: begins at the southern rim of the Valle Central and extends southeast to the Panamanian border.

Five historically active volcanoes are interspersed throughout the northern Cordillera de Guanacaste. There are five more volcanoes located in the Cordillera Central. Two of these - Volcan Irazu and Volcan Poas - are active.

Two major highland basin areas formed by the central and southern chains are the Valle Central and the Valle del General. The Valle Central is home to the nation's capital, San José, as well as the provincial capitals of Cartago, Heredia, and Alajuela. This valley is the most densely populated region in Costa Rica. Often the Valle Central is incorrectly referred to as the Meseta Central, a region that includes most but not all of the valley in addition to northern lands beyond the Valle Central. The second basin, Valle del General, is situated on the western side of the Cordillera de Talamanca. It is approximately the same size as the Valle Central but its floor lies at a lower elevation.

The Caribbean  
Lowlands:

The lowlands comprise approximately one-fifth of the area of Costa Rica and extend from the foothills of the Cordillera de Guanacaste to the Caribbean Sea. The area is laced with a series of rivers, from Río San Juan in the north to Río Sixaola in the south. Fresh water swamps are common. Puerto Limón is the only natural port of the Caribbean coast and site of the largest eastern settlement.

The Pacific  
Littoral:

Rocky headlands interspersed with short, narrow beaches characterize Costa Rica's expansive Pacific shoreline. Alluvial inland plains stretch from Osa Peninsula to the port of Puntarenas. Four peninsulas jut into the Pacific waters.

When first discovered, all of Costa Rica was covered with dense forest with the exception of isolated, drier areas in Guanacaste Province. The introduction of banana production in the 1880's initiated large-scale land clearing. By the early 1980s, only 33% of the original land remained covered by forests. The Pan-American Highway has opened the western region for deforestation. Large areas have since been cleared in Alajuela, Guanacaste, and Puntarenas provinces. Guanacaste Province is almost completely void of forests. There has been little attempt until recently to implement a large-scale replanting scheme. Nevertheless, recent governmental conservation efforts have included the designation of certain forest areas as protected reserves and the incorporation of additional hectares in national parks. Deforestation and environmental degradation are becoming serious problems that aggravate flooding and landslides.

Lakes and Rivers:

Originating in the mountain highlands, numerous rivers snake through the country toward the two coasts and a large, freshwater lake, Lago de Nicaragua, which is located just north of the Nicaraguan border. The Pacific shore forms four major bays and gulfs. Finally, two small northern lakes are fed by major rivers.

All rivers start in the cordillera ranges, flow toward lower elevations, and directly or indirectly empty into the Pacific Ocean or Caribbean Sea. Río Frío, the sole exception, flows into Lago de Nicaragua and feeds Laguna de Caño Negro, a tiny lake in the northern, central part of the country.



Flowing from Lago de Nicaragua and forming the northeastern border, the Río San Juan drains the northernmost sector of the Caribbean lowlands. The Río San Juan and the Río Colorado, its tributary, form one of only two regions that have extensive flood plains or deltas.

The Caribbean coastal plains host vast freshwater swamps that are characteristic of regions north of Limón.

Rivers flowing to the Pacific are generally fewer, shorter, and more precipitous than those running toward the Caribbean. They are more frequent along the northern coast and Guanacaste Province. Major Pacific rivers include the Río Tempisque, the Río Grande de Térrabolas, the Río General and the Río Grande de Térraba.

Due to consistent rainfall on the lowlands, rivers that empty into the Caribbean flow at a fairly constant volume and rate all year. Dry seasons, however, have an effect on the westward-flowing rivers. When the rains diminish in frequency, these rivers tend to dry up or decrease in volume.

The irregular Pacific coast forms the Papagayo Gulf, Nicoya Gulf, Coronado Bay, and Dulce Gulf. The Nicoya and Dulce gulfs are deep and are almost entirely surrounded by land.

Climate:

Rainy Season throughout Costa Rica

<u>City</u>	<u>Duration</u>	<u>No of Mths</u>
Limón	All Year	12
Golfito	April-December	9
Turrialba	May-January	9
San Isidro	May-December	8
Puerto Quepos	May-December	8
Tilaran	May-December	8
San José	May-November	7
El Coco	May-November	7
Esparta	May-November	7
Nicoya	May-November	7
Liberia	May-October	6
Las Canas	May-October	6

Source: OFDA Country Profile of Costa Rica, USAID, Washington, DC, 1987.

In the lowlands, temperatures reach 30° C or above, while in the heavily populated highlands, maximum temperatures range between 20-25° C. The highland capital of San José has a temperate rather than tropical climate.

In the coastal plain, the temperature varies from 21 to 33° C. The northern Pacific coast is dry, with an average rainfall of 2,100 mm. The southern Pacific coast is humid with rainfalls more than 3,450 mm. The Caribbean has a tropical climate with rainfall averaging 4,100 mm. National average precipitation is 3,300 mm per year. However, Costa Rica's rugged topography and the differences between Pacific and Atlantic air masses cause rainfall to be distributed unevenly throughout the country.

#### L. Agroeconomy

##### Overview:

Costa Rica is an economy with a strong participation of the state in certain key areas, such as public utilities, social security, banking and insurance.

Distribution of GDP per sector is the following:

Agriculture	20%
Industry	29%
Services	51%

Agriculture is the main sector of the economy. Agricultural products are the country's main exports, accounting for 70% of the total, and employing around 31% of the economically active population.

Source: World Development Report, 1987, World Bank.

##### Land utilization:

Total area	50,700 sq km
Land area	50,660 sq km
Arable land	2,850 sq km
Permanent Crops	3,200 sq km
Permanent Pastures	22,800 sq km
Forest and Woodland	16,400 sq km
Other land	5,410 sq km

Source: FAO Production Yearbook, 1986.

Planting and Harvesting Season

Commodity	Planting Season	Harvest Season
<b>Beverages</b>		
<b>Cacao:</b>		
Main crop	N.A.	October-January
Intermediate crop	N.A.	May-June
Small crop	N.A.	July-September
<b>Coffee:</b>		
Atlantic zone	N.A.	September-January
Central Plateau	N.A.	November-March
<b>Cereals &amp; Grains</b>		
Corn	March-May	August-September
Corn	July-September	December-February
Rice	March-May	August-September
<b>Fibers</b>		
Abaca (Atlantic Coast)	---	Throughout year
Cotton	July-August	December-January
<b>Forest products</b>		
Ipecac root	N.A.	Throughout year
<b>Fruits</b>		
Bananas	N.A.	Throughout year
<b>Oilseeds</b>		
Sesame seed	September	December-January
Cotton seed	July-August	December-January
<b>Sugarcane</b>		
	---	October-March
<b>Tobacco</b>		
Seedbeds	June-August	---
Transplanting	August-September	December-March
<b>Vegetables</b>		
Beans	March-May	August-September
Beans	July-September	November-February
Potatoes	April-May	September-October
Potatoes	November	February

Source: Planting and Harvesting Seasons in Latin America, Foreign Agricultural Service, US Department of Agriculture, 1958.

Basic economic  
indicators:

Annual inflation rate (1985-88)	16.6%
GNP - Average growth rate (1965-85)	1.4%
GNP per capita (1985)	US\$ 1,300

Costa Rica's external debt amounted in 1985 to US\$ 4,191,000, which is the highest per capita in Central America. The long-term external debt (as percentage of GNP in 1985) was 113.6%. Debt payments amounted to \$550 million in 1985, obligating approximately 40% of all export earnings to debt servicing.

The trade balance in 1985 was as follows:

Exports	US\$ 957,000,000
Imports	US\$ 1,108,000,000

and the current account deficit amounted to US\$ 168,000,000.

Source: Europe Yearbook 1986; Latin American Economic Report, 28 February 1989.

Export  
Commodities:

Coffee, bananas, sugar, cattle, and meat.  
Principal export markets: USA, GFR,  
Guatemala, El Salvador, and the Netherlands.

Imports:

Durable and non-durable consumer goods, oil and fuel, primary commodities. Major suppliers: USA, Guatemala, Japan, GFR, and El Salvador.

Source: World Bank Development Report 1987 (Basic Indicators); Europe Yearbook 1986.

M. Health

Crude Birth Rate / 1000 (1985)	29.0
Crude Death Rate / 1000 (1985)	4.0
Infant Mortality Rate (age under 1 year) (1985)	19.0
Life expectancy at birth (1985)	74.0
Number of physicians	2,535.0
Ratio Physicians / 1000 inhabitants	10.1
Number of nurses	1,300.0
Ratio nurses /1000 inhabitants	5.2
Number of hospital beds	6,776.0
Access to safe water (1983)	92.8%
Access to excreta disposal (1983)	94.8%

Source: World Bank Development Report 1987 (Basic indicators); OFDA Country Profile of Costa Rica, USAID, Washington DC, 1987.

Major Causes  
of Death:

Costa Rica established a national medical care system in 1973, covering the vast majority of nationals (94% in 1985) and registered refugees. Since then, prevention and control programmes have eliminated or greatly reduced the incidence of diseases endemic to tropical developing nations. However, with successful development, Costa Rica now faces health threats closely resembling those of industrialized countries, with cardiovascular diseases and cancers leading the list of major causes of death. Other causes of death include respiratory illnesses and poisonings.

Nutrition:

In general, sufficient food supplies are available - although there are families who cannot afford to purchase enough food. Severe forms of malnutrition, such as kwashiorkor and marasmus, are being eliminated. However, malnutrition is appearing at an earlier age and due to different causes. Severe bacterial and viral infections, parasites, congenital and other pre-natal defects, psycho-motor retardation, and child abuse have replaced food deficiency as the primary causes of malnutrition among children.

Health Care  
System:

The following organizations comprise the Costa Rican Health Sector:

- Office of the President
- Ministry of Planning and Economic Policy
- Ministry of Health - promotes health education and prevention programmes
- National Insurance Institute (INS) - provides workmen's compensation insurance, sponsors research
- National Water and Sewage Institute - an autonomous institution which provides water and installs sewage systems
- The University of Costa Rica - conducts research and trains medical personnel
- Costa Rica Social Security System (CCSS) - runs all public hospitals, employs 95% of health care professionals and administers recuperation and rehabilitation programmes.

Of these, the Ministry of Health, the INS, and the CCSS are the most important.

In 1985, there were 20 regional and peripheral hospitals which offer routine hospitalization. In addition, there were 123 clinics offering minor curative services and 1,023 primary health posts throughout the rural areas which provide primary care, first aid, and initial treatment of common illnesses. These facilities focus on preventive health care.

#### N. Housing

Basic construction techniques are similar for all types of housing in Costa Rica. Cost differences arise from the quality of the finishing, site location, and size of lot and construction. Concrete floors, block walls, and galvanized roofs are characteristic of low- and medium-cost housing. Low-cost units usually have walls made entirely of concrete block or a combination of block, forming a three-foot high wall, and wood-siding up to the roof structure. Roofing is often of corrugated zinc or asbestos panels.

Source: Latin America Housing Survey, OFDA, USAID, Washington DC, 1981.

#### O. Transportation

##### Roads:

In 1986, there were 35,685 kms of roads, of which only about 10% were paved. Since the rapid development of highways, motor transportation has become Costa Rica's main mode of transportation. The main road - the Pan American Highway running from Nicaragua to the border of Panama - is the foundation of the national road system from which major regional roads branch.

There are three types of road systems:

- the national grid
- the regional grid
- a system of unclassified roads, covering a total of 19,100 km.

Roads connecting the major towns and cities are paved, all-weather roads. Annually, flooding and landslides, caused by inundating rains, destroy sections of Costa Rica's roads. Dirt roads are often inaccessible, particularly in the northern and Caribbean coastal areas, due to the lengthy rainy season.

**Railroads:**

In the country, there are around 1,000 km of railroads, of which a sizeable proportion are plantation lines. The railroad has proved important for transportation of goods and linking the Limón on the Caribbean Coast with the highlands (Meseta Central). The other Government-run railway connects San José with Puntarenas on the Pacific coast.

**Ports:**

Costa Rica is served by two major ports - Puerto Limón, the principal port of Costa Rica, situated on the Atlantic coast, and Puntarenas and Caldera on the Pacific coast in the Gulf of Nicoya. Over the last years, Puerto Caldera has been developed as an extension of Puntarenas. Other ports are Golfito and Quepos, both situated on the Pacific coast.

**Inland Waterways:**

In Costa Rica's northern and Caribbean coastal regions, the Tortuguero Waterway, a canal, cuts through lagoons and rivers from Puerto Moin to the Nicaraguan border and parallels the Atlantic shore. Navigable rivers in the north and east include the Atlantic side: San Juan, San Carlos, Sarapiquí, Frio, Colorado, Tortuguero, and Sixalao Rivers. On the Pacific side of the cordilleras: the Tempisque, Grande de Térraba, Bebedero, Sierpe, Coto, Colorado, and Bolsón rivers.

**Airports:**

There are three major airports of international standard: Juan Santamaría International, in San José; Limón International, in Puerto Limón; and Tomás Guardia International in Liberia, Guanacaste Province.

Smaller airports service Cabo Velas, La Flor, Los Chiles, Chacarita, Quepos, Managua, Nuevo Palmar Sur, Golfito, Coto 63, Coto 47, San Vito de Java, Buenos Aires, Río Frío, San Pedro, Guápiles, and Pandora.

**Airlines:**

Domestic: Líneas Aereas Costarricense (LACSA), the national airline offers international flights, while government-owned Servicios

Aereas Nacionales (SANSA) flies domestically. Twenty-seven international airlines serve Costa Rica with either direct or connecting flights.

Additional information on transportation in Costa Rica can be found in Section IIB, Transportation Resources.

Source: OFDA Country Profile of Costa Rica, USAID, Washington DC, 1987.

#### P. Communications

Costa Rica has developed one of the most sophisticated communications networks in Central America. The rural population and the urban poor often rely on the radio as the primary source of information. Only six radio stations are Government-owned, and a few are property of the Catholic Church. Television has an extremely large reach in urban areas: more than 90% of the homes in San José and the provincial cities own a television set. Of the seven commercial television stations, one is government-controlled. Costa Rican law requires television broadcasts to consist of at least 20% domestically-produced programming. However, almost three-quarters of all television programmes are imported, principally from the United States and Mexico. The Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad (ICE) manages the automatic telephone system that reaches all regions of the country. Telephone access is good in rural and outlying areas.

Source: OFDA Country Profile of Costa Rica, USAID, Washington DC, 1987.

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## II. Infrastructural Resources of Costa Rica as Concern Refugees

### A. Health System

**General:** Costa Rica has a comprehensive health care system. Diseases endemic to developing nations have practically been eliminated. Its per capita expenditure for health care is by far the highest in Central America. Costa Rica provides health coverage for 93% of the population.

**Structure:** Under a reorganisation in 1973, the Ministry of Health's responsibility for preventive medicine was expanded. While it has retained some jurisdiction over the provision of curative medicine, its hospitals and most of its outpatient services were transferred to the Costa Rican Social Security System (CCSS), which thus employs 95% of the health care professionals. Under the auspices of the Ministry of Health, a comprehensive national plan has been developed for disaster situations.

Under the policy of Costa Rica, refugees have access to all available health services.

The country is divided into five regions: Central, Huetar Norte, Chorotega, Huetar Atlántica and Brunca. Each district is administered according to health sector management plans.

**Existing Health Services:** In 1985, there were 20 regional and peripheral hospitals with a capacity of 5,384 beds or 94.5% of all hospital beds in the country. These hospitals offer routine hospitalization. All nine national hospitals are located in San José. A regional hospital exists in each of the Limón, San José, Cartago, and Puntarenas provinces, and two are based in the province of Araгуela. Moreover, there are 123 clinics offering minor curative services.

Finally, the Ministry of Health operates 1,023 primary health posts throughout the rural areas that provide primary health care, first aid, and initial treatment of common illnesses. These facilities focus on preventive health care. Medical personnel are included.

In the Central Region (Región Central Norte), comprising the Provinces of San José, Heredia, and Alajuela, there are four national hospitals, all of them located in San José; one regional hospital in the Alajuela Province; one peripheral hospital in the Heredia Province; and two peripheral hospitals in the Alajuela Province. There are a total of 18 clinics in the region.

In the South Central Region (Región Central Sur), comprising the Provinces of San José, Cartago, and Puntarenas, there are five national hospitals, one in the San José Province, one regional and one peripheral hospital in the Carago Province, one peripheral hospital in the Puntarenas Province, and a total of 21 clinics in the region.

In the region of Huetar Norte, comprising the provinces of Alajuela and Heredia, there are two hospitals (one regional and one peripheral) in the Alajuela Province, and a total of six clinics.

In the region of Chorotega, comprising the Provinces of Alajuela, Guanacaste and Puntarenas, there is one regional hospital in Puntarenas and two peripheral ones in the Alajuela and Guanacaste Provinces, plus a total of 16 clinics.

In the region of Huetar Atlántica, comprising the provinces of Heredia and Limón, there are seven clinics, and one regional and one peripheral hospital (the latter in the Province of Limón).

Finally, in the Brunca Region, comprising the Provinces of San José and Puntarenas, there are one regional and four peripheral hospitals, in addition to a total of four clinics.

Refugee Health  
Care:

Refugee health care is organized at three levels:

- Health Services at the camp, where staff and supplies are financed by UNHCR;
- Referral to national health institutions outside the centres, where treatment is administered by the Social Security system of Costa Rica (with UNHCR financing);

- Referrals for special treatment, normally of an urgent character.

The Ministry of Health has the responsibility for the implementation of health activities for refugees in the camps outside San José.

The health and nutrition staff is designated by the Ministry of Health. They are supervised by a Coordinator, appointed by the Ministry of Health, and are distributed as follows:

	Physician	Medical Assistant
Boca de Arenal		X
Alvaperal	X	X*
Tilarán	X	X
Achiote	X	X
Playa Blanca	X	X
Limón	X	X

\* as well as a Nutrition Assistant

**Medical Supplies:** Under the auspices of the Ministry of Health, the ACIAR (Asociación Centro Integral para Refugiados) is responsible for the purchase and storage of medicines, which is financed by UNHCR.

**Cold Chain:** In each refugee camp there are adequate storage facilities for medicines, with cold chains.

**Vulnerability to Disease:** Some of Costa Rica's medical problems resemble those of developed nations. For instance, cardio-vascular diseases and cancers account for 41.3% of deaths. Diseases endemic to developing nations have practically been eradicated.

However, malaria risk still exists in certain provinces, such as Alejuela, Guanacaste, Limón, and Puntarenas.

In the refugee population, frequent diseases are malaria, diarrhoea, gastritis, lumbago, tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases, anemia, and parasital diseases.

B. Transportation resources

Road Network: In 1986, there were 35,684 km of roads, of which 11,000 km were all-weather roads, excluding 683 km of the Pan-American Highway.

All major cities are connected by paved roads. Roads in the northern and Caribbean coastal regions are generally undeveloped. They are often dirt roads on which it is impossible or difficult to manoeuvre most of the time due to the year-round rainy season. A new highway is being built from San José to Caldera on the Pacific Coast, and a new road links San José with Puerto Limón via the cities of Garápiles and Siquirres.

Costa Rican roads are vulnerable to earthquakes, flooding, and landslides, affecting transportation every year. However, as more and more roads are being paved as all-weather roads, the effects of flooding are becoming less of a problem.

Access to refugee camps is facilitated by their closeness to the national network of roads. The access roads are asphalt or paved roads. However, after heavy rains in one rainy season, the roads often become impassable.

Railroad Network: The railroad network consists of 1,286 km of track, of which 967 km are plantation lines. The track gauge is 1,007 mm. One government-run railroad line connects the Caribbean port, Limón with the highlands. Another government-run line connects San José with Puntarenas.

Airport Facilities: Costa Rica has three major airports that could accommodate an airlift of disaster relief items. They include Juan Santamaría International Airport, located in El Coco, 16 km northwest of San José and 4 km south of Alajuela, Limón International Airport, and Tomás Guardia International Airport, which serves Liberia, the capital of Guanacaste Province. There exist two other major airports: Tobías Bolaños, located approximately 5 km west of San José, used principally by light aircraft, and Golfito, which is not equipped for jet traffic. However, while Liberia and Puerto Limón airports can handle Boeing 727s, neither has all-weather instrumentation.

### Airport Facilities

Airport	Elevation (altitude)	Runway dimension in metres (length x width)	Runway Surface	Aircraft Capacity*
Golfito	15	1400 x 20	asphalt	twin-engine DC-3 up to 25,500 lbs.
Liberia Tomas Guardia	73	2200 x 30	asphalt	Boeing 727
Limón	7	1800 x 30	asphalt	BAC 111
San José Juan Santamaría	921	3012 x 45	asphalt	Boeing 747
San José Tobias Bolaños	975	1000 x 20	asphalt	twin-engine up to 5700 lbs.

\* It should be noted that this is only an approximation. Check with local aviation authorities as to which aircraft types can safely operate.

There are some 92 other state-owned aerodromes located throughout Costa Rica. For further details on airports, contact I.C.A.O. in Montreal, Canada, or Ministerio de Obras Públicas y Transporte, Dirección General de Aviación Civil, San José, Costa Rica, or consult Jeppesen's Airport Directory.

### Port Facilities:

#### Port Limón

Situated on the Atlantic coast, Port Limón is the principal port of Costa Rica. Authority: Junta de Administración Portuaria y Desarrollo de la Vertiente Atlántica (JAPDEVA), PO Box "T", Port Limón, Tel: 58 1043, Telex: 85 18 JAPDEVA. Approach: Hazard free entrance, depths range from 14.5 to 18 m. Anchorage between Uvita Island and Port installations. Pilotage: Four pilots available. VHF Channel 16. Weather: Tropical and humid climate with temperatures ranging from 25 - 31° C, NW winds in February and December. Precipitation for two-thirds of the year.

Tides: Range of tide 0.2 - 20 m. Largest vessel: Maximum depth 9.5 m, maximum length overall 210 m. Accommodation: Metallic Pier, Berth No 1, length 152 m, depth alongside 10 m used for loading bananas. Berth No 2, length 120 m, depth alongside 9 m used for general cargo. Berth No 3, length 135 m, depth alongside 8 m used for general cargo. Berth No 4, depth alongside 6 m. National pier: No 5 berth, length 90 m, depth alongside 3.9 - 5.5 m, used for general cargo. Berth No 6, length 152 m, depth alongside 10 m: fitted with roll on/roll off ramp. Seventh pier: No 7 berth, length 170 m, depth alongside 9 m used for general cargo. No 8 berth, length 150 m, depth alongside 8.5 m, used for general cargo. No 9 berth has a depth of 6 m, length 60 m, and is used for general cargo. Berth No 10 has a depth of 10 m and Berth No 11 a depth of 11 m. Storage: Covered storage space 18,758 m<sup>2</sup>, open storage space 21,000 m<sup>2</sup>. Cranes: Two cranes of 15 and 30 tonne capacity, one 10 tonne capacity mobile crane based at Seventh Pier. Container and Roll on/Roll off Facilities: Containers handled by mobile cranes or ship's gear. Roll on/roll off ramp at berth 6. Ore and Bulk Cargo Facilities: Limited quantities handled at Seventh Pier. Bunkers: Bunker C and diesel oil available from cistern trucks at all berths. Towage: Two tugs of 1800 and 3000 horsepower. Working hours: 24 hours a day. Cargo worked: 200 tonnes of general cargo/gang/working day.

#### Puntarenas

Situated on the Pacific Coast in the Gulf of Nicoya. Pilotage is available. Accommodation: Outer roadstead, in open sea, with sufficient depth for the largest ships. Good anchorage. Depth inside pier 7.31 m at low water, 9.14 m at high water, outside pier 8.23 m at low water, 10.67 m at high water. Agents recommend that inward vessels, berthed to load, should not draw more than 7.31 m. Pier takes two ships at a time, length innerside 109.7 m, outer side 137.2 m, giving all the facilities and security of modern wharfage. Four breast or mooring buoys, anchored to cement blocks, alongside the pier. Crane, gangway and slings. No elevators. Six railroad tracks run to the pier. Discharging is made directly into the railroad cars. Electric railway connects Puntarenas with San José, the capital, 128 km away. Airport: Service to the capital, San José, connections there with international flights.

Caldera

Situated on the Pacific coast at the entrance to the Gulf of Nicoya. Pilotage is compulsory. Pilot boards approximately 2 miles SW of the breakwater. Accommodation: Modern concrete quay 490 m in length containing three berths: one 210 m long, depth 11 m, for vessels up to 25,000 dead weight tonnage; one 150 m long, depth 10 m, for vessels up to 15,000 dead weight tonnage; the other 130 m long, depth 7 m, for vessels up to 5,000 dead weight tonnage. Storage: warehousing is available. Open storage area of 25,000 m<sup>2</sup>. Cranes: Mobile cranes of up to 127-tonne capacity and forklifts up to 35-tonne capacity. Containers and Roll on/Roll off Facilities: Containers are handled with modern equipment. There are 20 reefer points for refrigerated containers. Roll on/roll off cargos also handled. Bulk Cargo Facilities: Discharge system with pneumatic suction units and silos with 15,000 tonne storage capacity. Towage: Two tugs available: compulsory for berthing and unberthing. Airport: International Airport, 90 km from port. Working hours: 24 hours a day.

Golfito

Situated in the southern part of the Pacific coast. Approach: Minimum draught approaches, 9.14 m. No bars. One wharf affording two berths accommodates vessels drawing maximum of 7.31 m at banana pier and 7.92 m at general cargo pier. Facilities for loading and unloading (grabs, pallets and hysters). Rail spur on wharf, direct loading to rail truck. Average working rate: 18 tonnes per gang per hour. Ample labour. Pilotage: No light. Launch can be sent to guide ships if requested on radio system. VHF Channel 16. Tides: From January to June, tide of about 2.8 m. From June to December, tide of about 3.1 m. Storage: not available. Container facilities: not available. Airport: At Golfito, with plane service to San José, the capital. Working hours: 24 hours a day. Cargo worked: 21 tonnes per hour per gang.

Quepos

Situated on the Pacific Coast. Accommodation: Depth at 152.4 from wharf, 36.6 m. One wharf, 140.2 m by 12.80 m with 12.19 m depth forward and 7.31 m aft. Cranes: two 15-tonne railway cranes.



Puerto Moin

Port situated at the end of Tortuguero Waterway at the mouth of the Moin River. Entrance channel from the Caribbean. Installation: Three berths include:

- 1) Crude Oil Berth - steel-piled, open-type wharf 218 m long and 14.5 m deep.
- 2) Roll-on/Roll-off Berth - 30 m wide and 12 m deep.
- 3) Banana handling berth - steel-piles, open-type wharf 400 m long and 12 m deep. Equipment: Gantries available for bananas. Also, four cranes exist for the exportation of bananas; each has the capacity to transport 4,000 crates of bananas per hour.

Inland Waterways:

The 112 km Tortuguero Canal cuts through lagoons and canals joining the Río San Juan with the Río Moin. It runs parallel to the Caribbean coastline allowing ships to avoid the rough waters of the open sea.

In addition to the Tortuguero Canal, seven rivers in the Caribbean lowlands and six running to the Pacific can be navigated. Eastern rivers include the Río San Juan, which can be piloted for approximately 160 km, and two of its tributaries -- the Río San Carlos and the Río Sarapiquí.

Flowing from Lago de Nicaragua, the Río Frio can be travelled, as can the Colorado (for 48 km), the Tortuguero (for 11.2 km) and the Sixaola (for 17.6 km). The following constitute the navigable waterways on the Pacific coastal area: Río Tempisque - 40 km; Río Grande de Terraba - 24 km; Río Bebedero - 19.2 km; Río Sierpe - 16 km; Río Coto Colorado - 14.4 km; and Río Bolson - 6.4 km.

Due to the waterway use in northern Costa Rica and the Caribbean littoral, economic activity has grown in this region. Meanwhile, access road development in northeastern Costa Rica has not kept pace with construction in other parts of the country.

Source: Ports of the World, Lloyds of London Press Ltd., Essex.

C. Communications

Costa Rica's network is one of the most advanced in Central America. The majority of the national media are produced, distributed or transmitted from San José. One-third of Costa Rica's radio stations transmit from San José.

Television: Television is present in most urban homes. There are seven television stations, broadcasting primarily programmes produced in the United States or Mexico.

Radio: The rural population and the urban poor often rely on radio as the primary source of information.

Telephone Service: Direct long-distance calls can be made to most countries of the world.

The Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad (ICE) manages the automatic telephone systems throughout the country. Access to telephones even in rural and remote areas is good.

Radio-telephone links the UNHCR Regional Office in San José with all refugee centres, except with the refugee camp in Playa Blanca on the Southern Pacific Coast.

Telegraph and  
Telefax Service: Telegraph services are available throughout the country. The UNHCR Regional Office in San José has a direct telefax link with UNHCR Headquarters.

Source: South America, Central America, and the Caribbean. Europa Publishers, London, 1988.

D. Water Resources

Average annual rainfall is about 3,150 mm with a range between 1,200 mm and 7,500 mm, making Costa Rica one of the rainiest countries in the world.

Generally speaking, there have been no major problems as regards supply of water to the refugee camps.

National Water  
Authority:

The Costa Rican Government agency responsible for the development and provision of water is the Instituto Costarricense de Acueductos y Alcantarillados (A y A), which also controls the treatment and disposal of sewage effluents in towns and large villages. Within this institution, the "Dirección de Acueductos Rurales" is the unit in charge of the formulation of service policies and standards as well as the provision of water supplies in rural areas.

Emergency Water  
Supply:

The availability of safe water for drinking purposes varies from one area to another in accordance with topography and hydrogeological conditions. Hilly areas could benefit from numerous springs, the water of which may be easily tapped and conveyed by gravity-fed pipelines at minimal cost. Surface water (rivers, creeks, brooks) may also be considered as drinking water sources (for gravity-fed or pumped supplies) if appropriate treatment is carried out (normally sedimentation, coagulation, slow-sand filtration and disinfection). Groundwater resources may provide high quality water in those areas having the right geological formations (alluvial fills, lava-flow aquifers, etc.). Depth of water tables varies from place to place in accordance with topography and geology. In alluvial terrains, water tables may be located between 0.5 m and 25 m below the ground surface. In lavas or other types of fractured rocks, the position of water tables may vary between 5 m and 100 m below the ground. Groundwater yields also vary in accordance with geological conditions. Typical yields may vary between one litre per second (in alluvial or volcanic tuff terrains) to more than 75 litres per second (in lava aquifers).

Both A y A and the "Servicio Nacional de Riego y Avenamiento" (SENARA, the irrigation authority) have extensive information about the position, yields and "drillability" of all aquifers in the country.

Water rights are normally required to tap (springs, rivers), drill, exploit (dug-wells and boreholes), and use any water resources. The "Servicio Nacional de Electricidad (SNE) is the institution in charge of the granting of these rights.

**Water Resources  
Development:**

The development of water resources for refugee camps or settlements may be made directly by A y A or could be carried out by contractors. Most engineering contractors offer consultancy services during the planning and design stages of project implementation. A good number of drilling companies may drill boreholes by contract too. In case of emergency, local contractors could provide most of the necessary equipment and material for installation of water systems.

**E. Storage Facilities**

The National Production Council (CNP), which works in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, maintains silos and warehouses.

**a) The CNP's Food Storage Capacity in 1985**

Location	Plants	Sites (MT)	W/houses (MT)
Puntarenas	Silos Barranca	21,823	13,000
Heredia	La China	12,488	910
Palmar Sur	Terraba	10,800	3,000
Guanacaste	Liberia	14,545	0
Quepos	La Managua	10,800	3,000
Total		70,458	19,910

Source: Consejo Nacional de Producción (CNP), 1985

**b) Storage Capacity in the Refugee Camps**

Location	Agency	Capacity
San José,*	WFP	480m <sup>2</sup>
Albaperal	CRC	320m <sup>2</sup>
Tilaran	CASP/CAMP	231m <sup>2</sup>
Achiote	CIR	216m <sup>2</sup>
Limón	CASP/CAMP	73m <sup>2</sup>

\*Bodega Central - capacity 400 MT

### III. Description and Requirements of Affected Populations

#### A. Nicaraguans - General

**Housing:** The most common housing of urban poor are makeshift shelters or rooms. The building materials used include hollow clay tile, concrete and concrete block, brick, and, to a limited extent, wood. About half of Managua's lower middle-income housing was of wood, concrete block, or wood and block combination. Another traditional construction, "taquezal", consists of timber frame walls of widely spaced posts connected by double lathing filled with stone and mud balls, and plastered with stucco when dry. Floors and roofs are also framed, the latter overlaid with clay tile, cement, asbestos sheeting or corrugated sheet.

The traditional housing for the rural poor is mainly of two types. The small rancho, common in the Pacific lowlands, has walls of poles (sometimes mud-covered) or cane, and often a straw roof distinguished by its four sides. There are usually two rooms.

The rectangular cane-type is the common dwelling of poor people in the highlands. Additions with single shed roofs are attached to the short sides of the house and sometimes to the back. Walls may be of poles, cane or board, or of poles or cane covered with mud-straw mix; tiles are frequently use for roofing.

**Food Preferences:** The staple food is maize. Rice, sorghum, wheat (in urban areas), and small amounts of barley are other preferred grains. Beans (red kidney preferred, dried black, and white) are the ubiquitous accompaniment to maize in rural areas. Meat consumption is generally low. Tomatoes and onions are widely used, but overall consumption of vegetables is low.

**Health Status:** Protein-energy malnutrition is considered widespread, as are gastritis, diarrhoea, anemia, infections and parasitic diseases and malaria.

**Water and Sanitation:** Rural Nicaraguans rarely have access to piped water or hygienic sanitary facilities in their own country. A majority of urban Nicaraguans normally have access to piped water, and a minority to hygienic sanitary facilities.

## B. Nicaraguan Refugees in Costa Rica

Refugee Population: In the course of preparation for CIREFCA (Conferencia internacional sobre los refugiados centroamericanos) in 1989, it was estimated that some 250,000 displaced Central Americans were to be found in Costa Rica. At the end of 1989, 26,485 Nicaraguans (Ladinos and Miskitos) were receiving UNHCR assistance.

Language: Ladinos speak Spanish, whereas Miskitos speak English and Miskito.

Religion: Ladinos: Roman Catholic  
Miskitos: Roman Catholic and Protestant.

Previous Occupational Activities: Farming or seasonal work

Food Preferences: There have been some difficulties with the Nicaraguan ladinos in accepting some commodities such as canned fish, meat, dried skim milk, and cheese. The ladinos prefer rice, beans, cereals (wheat) for breadbaking, fresh meat and fish, and fruits. The World Food Programme provides the bulk of the staple food: beans, dried skim milk, rice, oil, maize (in grain), and canned meat. The diet given to the Nicaraguans is very high in calories and proteins.

## C. Salvadorians - General

Housing: Overcrowding is symptomatic for the rural poor in El Salvador. Often a family of five persons has only one room at its disposal. For a one-room adobe structure, locally available hand-made housing materials are used. Thus, a typical home will have a hard-packed dirt floor, a tile roof, and walls made of mud supported by a framework of small tree branches, split bamboo, adobe, straw or grasses. The roofs are thatched with sugarcane leaves or jarajula grass.

For the urban Salvadorian population the most common building materials are wood, adobe, cement, brick, metal sheets, and tiles or metal sheets for the roof.

Food Preferences: Staple foods are white maize (used in the preparation of "tortillas"), rice, beans (preferably red ones), coffee, fruits, bananas, meat (beef, pork, and chicken,) dried fish (sporadically), eggs, and cheese. Exaggerated consumption of sugar and salt also characterizes Salvadorian preferences. The world Food Programme provides rice, red beans, dried skim (not well accepted), tinned

**C O S T A   R I C A**

**AN EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PROFILE**

Office of the United Nations  
High Commissioner for Refugees

March 1990

## FOREWORD

This profile of Costa Rica is part of a Regional Emergency Preparedness Profile for Central America and Mexico. These profiles are designed to provide, in one accessible document, factual information on selected countries and are intended as an emergency preparedness measure in support of UNHCR planning and relief operations. The profiles are principally concerned with the kinds of information and resources needed during refugee emergencies in order to facilitate contingency planning and action along with rapid decision-making. They are designed to satisfy a number of audiences including UNHCR decision-makers, UNHCR Headquarters personnel proceeding on mission, newly-appointed UNHCR field personnel and consultants, UNHCR regional bureaux and field offices, and implementing partners. The UNHCR Handbook for Emergencies will often be able to provide complementary information.

Various sections of UNHCR have helped the Emergency Unit compile this profile. The information does not claim to be complete - indeed an effort was made to keep the profile short, readable and concise while pointing readers to additional sources containing details they may need. The profile has been drawn up at short notice to respond to current demand and should be viewed as a draft that may still contain inconsistencies and inaccuracies. It would be appreciated if these as well as suggestions that may strengthen future editions of the Costa Rica profile could be brought to the Emergency Unit's attention.

Emergency Unit  
Technical Support Service



THE UNHCR EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PROFILE SERIES  
(as of February 1990)

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protein-rich foods (sardines - not well accepted, and mackerel - more easily accepted), chicken in curry (not well accepted because of the sauce), oil, and wheat flour.

Health Status: Major causes of death include perinatal problems, intestinal or respiratory infection, and heart disease.

D. Salvadorian Refugees in Costa Rica

Refugee Population: 3,925 (as at end 1989)

Language: Spanish

Religion: Roman Catholic

Previous Occupational Activities: The majority of the refugees are of urban origin.