COSTARICA Constartante Const

Module 12 **Planning the Move**



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Planning the Move to Costa Rica

Orchestrating your relocation to Costa Rica involves significant logistical planning that begins well before your departure date. This section covers the critical aspects of physically moving your belongings, ensuring your pets join you safely, and navigating the customs regulations that govern what you can bring into your new home country.

Choosing a Moving Company and Packing Tips

Selecting the right moving partner is one of the most consequential decisions in your relocation journey. International moves require specialized expertise that not all moving companies possess. Begin researching international movers with Costa Rican experience at least 3-6 months before your planned departure. Request detailed quotes from at least three companies, and verify their credentials through international moving associations like FIDI (International Federation of International Movers) or IAM (International Association of Movers).

When evaluating potential movers, inquire specifically about their experience with Costa Rican customs procedures and whether they have local partners in Costa Rica who can assist with the clearance process. The most qualified companies will offer door-to-door service, handling both international shipping and local delivery within Costa Rica. They should provide clear documentation of their insurance coverage and claims process for potential damages.

Shipping options typically include full container loads (FCL), where you have exclusive use of a shipping container, or less-than-container loads (LCL), where your belongings share container space with other shipments. FCL provides more security and potentially faster delivery, while LCL offers cost savings for smaller shipments. Air freight is substantially more expensive but may be appropriate for essential items you'll need immediately upon arrival.

Packing strategies should account for Costa Rica's tropical climate. The high humidity can damage electronics, books, artwork, and wooden furniture. Consider climate-controlled storage for items you won't immediately need. Special moisture-absorbing materials and sealed plastic containers can protect vulnerable items during shipping and subsequent storage.

Document each item being shipped with photographs and detailed inventory lists. Keep copies of these records separate from your shipment, preferably in a digital format that is accessible from anywhere. Label all boxes in both English and Spanish, being particularly explicit about fragile items or those requiring special handling.

Many expatriates recommend bringing high-quality linens, kitchen equipment, and electronics, as these items can be significantly more expensive in Costa Rica. However, carefully research electrical compatibility, as Costa Rica uses 110V electricity with American-style plugs. Some European appliances may require transformers or may not function properly even with adapters.

Consider leaving behind heavy furniture pieces that can be replaced locally. Costa Rica has excellent craftsmen who can create custom wooden furniture at reasonable prices, often using beautiful local hardwoods. This approach reduces shipping costs and supports the local economy.





Managing Pets During Relocation

Costa Rica has relatively straightforward pet import regulations compared to many countries, but proper preparation remains essential for a smooth transition. Begin planning your pet's relocation at least four months before your move to allow time for required vaccinations and health certifications.

The basic requirements for bringing pets to Costa Rica include an international health certificate (Certificado Veterinario Internacional) issued by an accredited veterinarian in your home country, current rabies vaccination administered at least 30 days but not more than 12 months before entry, and treatment for internal and external parasites within two weeks of travel. The health certificate must be endorsed by your country's veterinary authority (in the US, this would be USDA-APHIS) and is typically valid for only 14 days, so timing is crucial.

When selecting flights, prioritize direct routes whenever possible to minimize stress on your pet. Many expatriates report positive experiences with carriers like United, American Airlines, and Copa, which have established pet transportation protocols. Avoid arriving on weekends or holidays when veterinary officials may have limited availability at ports of entry.



Acclimating pets to Costa Rica's tropical climate requires attention, particularly for breeds with thick coats or shortened airways (brachycephalic breeds). Consider scheduling your move during Costa Rica's dry season (December to April) when temperatures are more moderate. Upon arrival, gradually introduce your pet to longer outdoor periods, always ensuring access to shade and fresh water.

Veterinary care in Costa Rica is generally good in urban areas, with many veterinarians trained internationally and some speaking English. Research and identify potential veterinarians near your intended residence before arriving. Heartworm prevention is essential throughout Costa Rica, and depending on your location, additional parasite preventatives may be recommended.





Customs Regulations for Importing Belongings

Costa Rica's customs regulations allow for duty-free import of household goods and personal effects for those with approved residency status or those applying for residency. However, navigating these regulations requires careful attention to detail and timing.

To qualify for duty-free importation, goods must have been owned and used for at least six months before shipment. New items may be subject to import duties ranging from 13–50% of their value. Your shipment should arrive within six months of your own entry into Costa Rica, though extensions can sometimes be arranged through customs brokers.

Detailed inventory lists in Spanish are required for customs clearance, including serial numbers for electronics and appliances. These inventories should be prepared well in advance and verified by your moving company.

Certain items face import restrictions or special requirements, including: Vehicles incur substantial import taxes ranging from 52-79% of their assessed value, making vehicle importation often economically impractical. Many expatriates choose to sell their vehicles before departing and purchase them locally in Costa Rica.

Electronics and appliances should be limited to reasonable quantities for household use. Multiple identical items (such as several televisions of the same size) may raise suspicion of commercial intent and face additional scrutiny.

Firearms require special permits from the Costa Rican Ministry of Public Security, a process that begins before importation and can take several months. Many expatriates choose to leave firearms behind rather than navigate this complex process.

Food items, plants, and agricultural products are subject to significant restrictions and may be confiscated upon arrival. It's generally advisable to avoid including these in your shipment.

Working with a customs broker (agente aduanal) is highly recommended and often required to clear shipments through Costa Rican customs. Your international mover should coordinate with a reputable local broker, but you should request their credentials and communicate directly to ensure smooth processing.

Duties and taxes, if applicable, must be paid before your shipment is released from customs. Having funds readily available for these potential expenses helps prevent costly storage fees for delayed shipments. The customs clearance process typically takes 2–3 weeks after your shipment arrives in Costa Rica, assuming all documentation is in order.

The physical relocation of your belongings represents one of the most tangible aspects of your move to Costa Rica. This process becomes manageable despite its complexity with proper planning, realistic expectations, and professional assistance. Throughout this masterclass, you'll hear from expatriates who have successfully navigated these logistics, offering practical insights into what worked well and what they might have done differently.