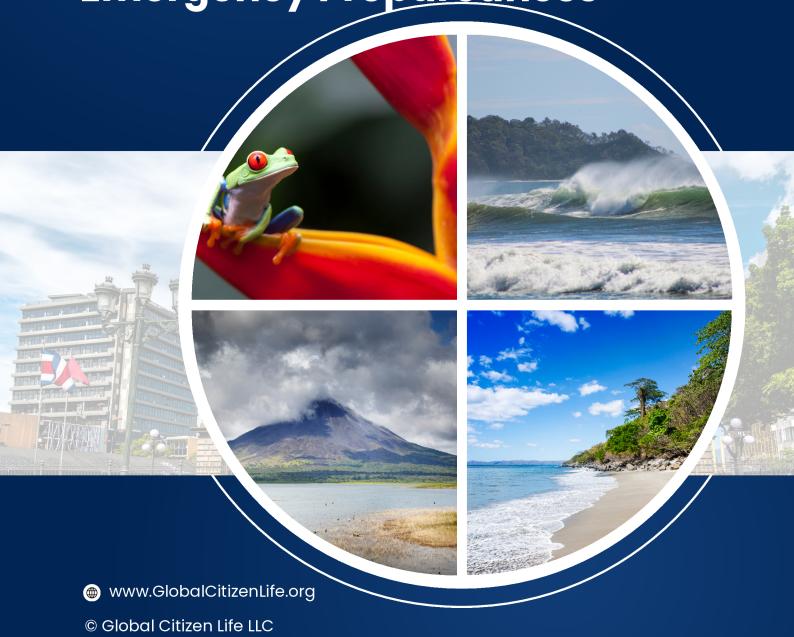
# COSTARICA Contacter class

Module 13 **Emergency Preparedness** 



### **Emergency Contacts and Communication**

Living in Costa Rica requires understanding the local emergency response systems and establishing reliable communication channels during crises.

Costa Rica has a well-established emergency response network but operates differently than North American or European systems.

The primary emergency number in Costa Rica is 911, which functions similarly to emergency services in the United States. This centralized number connects callers to police, fire departments, ambulance services, and other emergency responders. However, response times can vary significantly depending on your location, with urban areas typically receiving faster assistance than remote regions.

It's crucial to program additional direct emergency numbers into your phone. The Cruz Roja (Red Cross) at 128 handles many medical emergencies and can be more responsive in certain situations. The Policía (Police) can be reached directly at 117, the Bomberos (Firefighters) at 118, and the Guardacostas (Coast Guard) at 800-808-8000 if you live near coastal areas.

When establishing your emergency communication plan, consider the limitations of infrastructure in Costa Rica. Power outages are common during severe weather, potentially affecting internet and cell service. Invest in backup communication options like a portable battery charger for your phone, a battery-powered radio, and potentially a satellite phone if you'll be living in a remote area.





Create a comprehensive emergency contact list that includes local friends, neighbors, your embassy or consulate, healthcare providers, insurance representatives, and property managers. Store physical copies of this list in easily accessible locations throughout your home and share digital copies with family members both in Costa Rica and abroad.

Language barriers can complicate emergencies, so prepare bilingual emergency cards with key phrases, your address, medical conditions, and emergency contacts. Consider taking Spanish lessons focused on emergency vocabulary or downloading offline translation tools to assist during crises when internet access may be unavailable.

Establish neighborhood communication networks before emergencies occur.

Many expat communities maintain

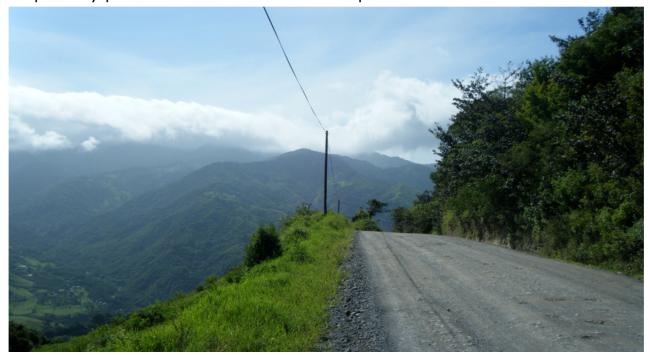
WhatsApp groups specifically for emergencies, allowing residents to check on each other and coordinate responses during power outages or natural disasters. These community networks often prove invaluable for sharing real-time information when official channels are overwhelmed.



Costa Rica experiences various natural hazards, including earthquakes, volcanic activity, flooding, landslides, and tropical storms. Understanding the specific risks in your region and developing appropriate response strategies is essential for your safety.

Earthquakes are common throughout Costa Rica due to its location along the Pacific Ring of Fire. The country experiences hundreds of minor tremors annually, with significant earthquakes occurring every few years. When selecting housing, prioritize newer constructions built to modern seismic codes and avoid homes on steep hillsides vulnerable to landslides. Inside your home, secure heavy furniture to walls, install cabinet latches, and identify safe spaces like sturdy tables or doorways for shelter during tremors. Create earthquake kits containing water, non-perishable food, medications, first aid supplies, flashlights, and important documents you can access quickly.

Costa Rica has several active volcanoes, primarily in the central and northern regions. Research their activity patterns and monitoring systems if you're considering living near volcanic areas like Arenal, Poás, or Turrialba. The National Emergency Commission (CNE) provides updates on volcanic activity and evacuation protocols. Familiarize yourself with evacuation routes and assembly points in your community, and prepare respiratory protection like N95 masks for potential ash falls.



During the rainy season (May through November), flooding and landslides become significant concerns, particularly in mountainous areas and along riverbanks. The Pacific coast typically experiences more intense rainfall than the Caribbean side. Before purchasing or renting property, investigate the area's flooding history and proximity to rivers or slopes. Install proper drainage systems around your property and consider waterproofing vulnerable areas. During heavy rainfall, monitor official weather alerts from the Instituto Meteorológico Nacional (IMN) and follow evacuation orders without delay.

The Caribbean coast faces higher hurricane risks, though direct hits are less common than in other Caribbean nations. The Pacific coast occasionally experiences effects from Pacific hurricanes. Regardless of your location, prepare hurricane supplies, including water (at least one gallon per person per day for several days), nonperishable food, medicines, cash, important documents in waterproof containers, and materials to secure your home, such as plywood for windows.





Register with your country's embassy or consulate upon arrival in Costa Rica to receive emergency alerts and evacuation assistance if necessary. The SMART Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) for U.S. citizens and similar programs for other nationalities provide crucial communication during major disasters.

Finally, consider comprehensive insurance coverage that specifically addresses natural disasters common in your region. Standard policies may exclude earthquake, flood, or volcanic damage, requiring additional riders. Document your belongings with photographs and maintain digital copies of important documents in secure cloud storage for insurance claims after disasters.



# **Healthcare Emergencies**

Understanding how to navigate healthcare emergencies in Costa Rica requires advanced preparation and knowledge of both public and private medical systems. The country offers quality medical care, but emergency response protocols differ significantly from North America and Europe.

Costa Rica's public healthcare system, known as the Caja Costarricense de Seguro Social (CCSS or "Caja"), provides emergency services to anyone regardless of insurance status or residency. However, in true emergencies, your closest hospital may be your best option, irrespective of whether it's public or private. Familiarize yourself with the nearest hospitals and clinics to your home, noting which facilities offer 24-hour emergency services and which specialize in treating specific conditions.

Private hospitals like CIMA, Clínica Bíblica, and Hospital La Católica in the Central Valley typically offer faster service and more English-speaking staff than public facilities, but at significantly higher costs. Outside major urban areas, your options may be limited to smaller public hospitals or clinics (EBAIS) with fewer resources and specialists. In remote locations, evacuation to a major hospital might be necessary for serious conditions.



Comprehensive health insurance becomes essential for managing healthcare emergencies in Costa Rica. While residency applicants must enroll in the Caja, supplemental private insurance is strongly recommended to cover services the public system doesn't provide or to access private facilities. International health insurance with evacuation coverage is particularly valuable if you live in remote areas or have complex medical conditions that might require treatment unavailable in Costa Rica.

Create detailed medical profiles for each family member, including blood types, chronic conditions, medications, allergies, and previous surgeries. Translate these documents into Spanish and store copies in your wallet, phone, home emergency kit, and with a trusted local contact. Consider wearing medical alert bracelets for serious conditions like diabetes, epilepsy, or severe allergies.



Prescription medication management requires advance planning. Identify local pharmacies (farmacias) that stock your essential medications and learn their generic names in Spanish, as brand names often differ. Maintain at least a month's emergency supply of critical medications, properly stored to withstand power outages or humidity. Not all medications available in your home country are accessible in Costa Rica, so research alternatives with your doctor before relocating.

Language barriers can complicate medical emergencies, making learning basic Spanish medical terminology valuable. Prepare a list of translated medical phrases relevant to your specific health concerns. Several hospitals offer translator services, but these may not be available during nighttime emergencies or in smaller facilities. Mobile translation apps that work offline can provide assistance when professional translators aren't available.

For those with specific medical conditions, connect with relevant support groups before emergencies arise. Organizations like the Diabetes Association of Costa Rica or the Costa Rican Heart Association can provide valuable resources and connections to specialists familiar with your condition.





Creating a resilient household emergency system is fundamental to thriving in Costa Rica, where infrastructure vulnerabilities and natural events can disrupt normal services. A comprehensive approach to home preparedness addresses water, food, power, communication, and security needs during various emergency scenarios.

Water security should be your top priority. While Costa Rica has abundant rainfall, municipal water systems can fail during earthquakes or storms. Store at least one gallon of water per person daily for at least seven days. Consider investing in water purification systems such as quality filters, purification tablets, or a portable purifier that can process rainwater or natural water sources. Rainwater collection systems provide an excellent backup water source, particularly during the rainy season, but require proper filtration before consumption.

Food security involves maintaining a rotating supply of non-perishable foods that align with your dietary needs and preferences. Stock items that require minimal preparation and can be consumed without cooking if necessary. Costa Rican staples like rice, beans, canned tuna, powdered milk, and locally available fruits with long shelf lives (like pineapples and plantains) make practical emergency supplies.

Periodically check expiration dates and replace items before they expire, incorporating them into your regular meals to minimize waste.

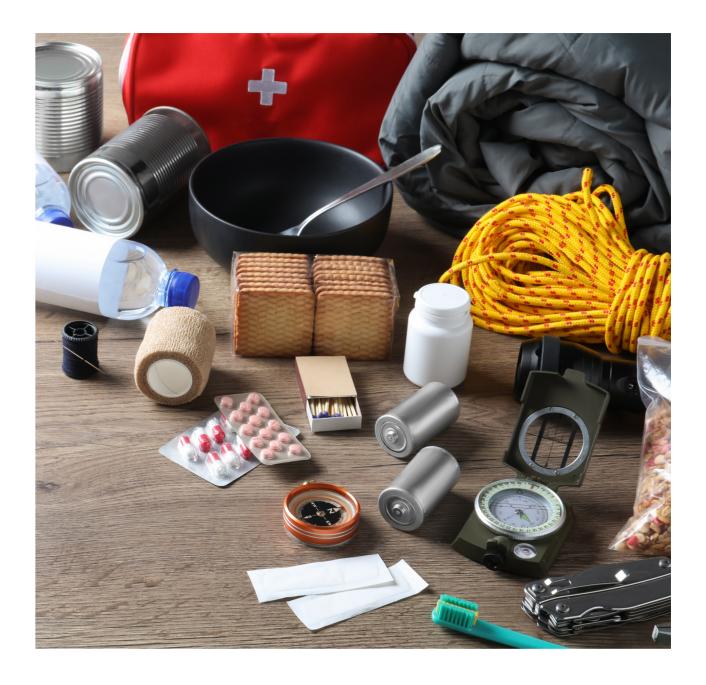
Power disruptions occur regularly throughout Costa Rica, especially during the rainy season. Backup power solutions range from simple battery banks for charging essential electronics to comprehensive solar systems with battery storage. Traditional gas generators remain popular but require safe fuel storage and proper ventilation when operating. Solar-powered options have become increasingly affordable and offer sustainable power without fuel concerns. At a minimum, maintain a supply of battery-powered lanterns, flashlights with extra batteries, and candles with matches stored in waterproof containers.

Home security considerations should include plans for both during and after emergencies when normal security systems might be compromised. Install quality deadbolts on all exterior doors and security bars (rejas) on windows, including emergency release mechanisms from inside. Create designated safe rooms within your home where family members can gather during emergencies, stocked with essential supplies and communication tools. Establish neighborhood watch rotations with trusted neighbors during extended emergencies to maintain community security.

Develop comprehensive evacuation plans for different scenarios, including rapidly accessible "go bags" containing essential documents (passports, residency cards, insurance policies, property titles), medications, cash in both colones and dollars, clothing, basic hygiene supplies, and emergency contact information. Store digital copies of important documents in encrypted cloud storage accessible from any location with internet connectivity.

Fire safety requires particular attention in Costa Rica, where building codes and electrical standards may differ from your home country. Install smoke detectors and fire extinguishers on each floor of your home, focusing on kitchens, bedrooms, and areas with significant electrical equipment. Create fire evacuation plans with multiple exit routes and practice these regularly with household members.

Finally, seasonal home maintenance should be conducted with a focus on emergency preparedness. Before the rainy season, clear gutters and drainage systems, trim trees near power lines and structures, inspect roofs for leaks, and check windows and doors for proper sealing. These preventative measures significantly reduce the risk of emergencies escalating into disasters.



# **Emergency Supply Kit Recommendations**

For expatriates, assembling comprehensive emergency kits tailored to Costa Rica's specific challenges is essential. Unlike standardized emergency kits from North America or Europe, Costa Rican emergency supplies should address tropical conditions, potential isolation periods, and local resource limitations.

Create a multi-tiered emergency supply system with different kits for various scenarios. Your primary home emergency kit should be substantial enough to sustain your household for at least two weeks without external assistance. Store these supplies in waterproof, air-tight containers in accessible locations throughout your home. Consider dividing supplies among several containers rather than one large kit to facilitate quick access and potential mobility.

Water purification deserves particular attention in your emergency planning. Include multiple redundant systems such as a gravity-fed ceramic filter, chemical purification tablets, and portable filtration devices like LifeStraws. While bottled water provides immediate relief, sustainable purification methods prove crucial during extended emergencies when replacement bottled water becomes unavailable.

Food supplies should combine shelf-stable packaged foods with locally available, naturally preserved options. Traditional Costa Rican food preservation techniques like sun-dried fruits and properly stored grains can supplement commercial emergency foods. Include vitamin supplements to address nutritional gaps during extended reliance on preserved foods. Cooking alternatives like small propane camping stoves, solar ovens, or traditional wood-burning setups provide versatility when standard cooking methods are unavailable.

Medical supplies should extend beyond basic first aid to include tropical-specific treatments. If you live in certain coastal regions, stock antihistamines for insect reactions, anti-diarrheal medications, oral rehydration salts, and antimalarial medications. Include extra prescription medications, antimicrobial ointments specifically formulated for tropical climates, and burn treatments. Depending on your location's wildlife profile, specialty items like snake bite kits may be necessary.

Clothing and personal items should focus on moisture management and protection. They should include multiple changes of quick-drying clothing, sturdy closed-toe shoes, and protective rain gear. Lightweight long-sleeved shirts and pants provide both sun and insect protection. Personal hygiene supplies should be generous, as tropical conditions accelerate hygiene-related health concerns.

Communication tools should include battery-powered or hand-crank radios capable of receiving emergency broadcasts on Costa Rican frequencies. Consider HAM radio equipment if you live in particularly remote areas, as amateur radio networks often remain functional when other systems fail. Maintain physical maps of your region with evacuation routes clearly marked, as digital navigation systems commonly fail during widespread emergencies.

Financial preparedness involves maintaining cash reserves in colones and US dollars stored in waterproof containers. Emergency funds should cover at least one month of expenses, including potential temporary relocation costs. Physical copies of insurance policies, banking information, and emergency contacts should also be kept in waterproof document holders.





# **Family Emergency Plans**

Creating culturally appropriate, location-specific family emergency plans significantly improves outcomes during crises in Costa Rica. These plans must account for Costa Rica's unique infrastructure, social systems, and geographic considerations while addressing expatriates' specific vulnerabilities.

Begin by developing comprehensive communication protocols for your family. Establish primary and backup communication methods, including designated emergency meeting points if family members are separated during a crisis. Create a communication tree that includes both local contacts and international family members who can coordinate assistance from abroad. Identify specific scenarios when these protocols activate, such as earthquakes above certain magnitudes or extended power outages.

Document multiple evacuation routes from your home to predetermined safe locations. Many expatriates make the mistake of planning only one evacuation route, which may become impassable during floods or landslides. Map at least three alternative routes to different safe destinations, considering seasonal changes that might affect road conditions. If you live in a flood-prone area, identify higher-ground locations within walking distance.

In your emergency planning, address the unique needs of vulnerable family members. For families with young children, elderly relatives, or members with disabilities or medical conditions, develop specific protocols tailored to their requirements. Prepare comfort items for children, mobility assistance plans for older adults, and backup medical equipment for those with health concerns.

Create role assignments for each family member during emergencies. Designate specific responsibilities like managing water supplies, monitoring emergency communications, caring for pets, or securing the home. Practice these roles regularly through family emergency drills, adapting protocols based on performance, and changing family dynamics.

Establish community integration within your emergency planning. Connect with neighbors, particularly long-term residents familiar with local hazard patterns. Many Costa Rican communities maintain informal emergency response networks that often mobilize faster than official systems. Exchange contact information with neighbors and discuss mutual assistance arrangements before emergencies occur.

Develop contingency plans for extended displacement from your home. Identify potential temporary housing options, including hotels with generator backup, friends' homes in different regions, or even a temporary return to your home country if necessary. Pre-arrange pet care options with trusted neighbors or local veterinary facilities that offer boarding services during emergencies.

Create educational components within your family plan, particularly for children or recent arrivals unfamiliar with Costa Rican emergency patterns. Teach children to identify warning signs of common emergencies like landslides or floods and appropriate immediate responses. Practice emergency Spanish phrases essential for seeking assistance.

# **Resources for Ongoing Emergency Information**

Staying informed about emerging threats and ongoing emergencies requires connecting with reliable, timely information sources appropriate for expatriates in Costa Rica. Developing a comprehensive information network before emergencies occur ensures you receive critical updates during rapidly evolving situations.

The Comisión Nacional de Prevención de Riesgos y Atención de Emergencias (CNE) serves as Costa Rica's primary emergency management agency, providing official alerts and response coordination. Download their mobile application and follow their social media accounts for immediate notifications. The CNE issues color-coded alerts (green, yellow, red) indicating emergency severity levels and recommended actions. Understanding these official alert systems helps you respond appropriately without overreacting to minor situations or underestimating serious threats.

The Instituto Meteorológico Nacional (IMN) provides weather forecasting and monitoring critical for anticipating floods, landslides, and tropical storms. Their specialized forecasts for different regions offer valuable insights beyond general weather apps designed for tourists. Subscribe to region–specific alerts relevant to your location, particularly during the rainy season when conditions can change rapidly.

Local expatriate networks provide contextually relevant emergency information often unavailable through official channels. These informal networks frequently offer practical insights about road conditions, localized flooding, and community-level response activities. To access these information streams, join area-specific Facebook groups, WhatsApp communities, and in-person expatriate organizations.

International resources like the U.S. Embassy's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) or equivalent programs from other nations provide country-specific security alerts and evacuation assistance during major emergencies. These services are particularly valuable during political instability or large-scale natural disasters when coordinated international response is necessary.

Develop multilingual information sources to ensure comprehensive situational awareness. Spanish-language local news outlets often provide more detailed and timely information than English-language sources during emergencies. Radio stations like Monumental (93.5 FM) and Columbia (98.7 FM) broadcast emergency information nationally, while regional stations offer localized updates.

Technology-based solutions like emergency alert applications specifically designed for Costa Rica provide another information layer. Applications such as "CR Emergency" aggregate alerts from multiple official sources, providing translations and location-specific notifications. When cellular networks fail, satellite-based communication tools like Garmin inReach or SPOT devices offer text messaging and emergency notification capabilities.

Establish connections with local municipal emergency committees (Comités Municipales de Emergencia) in your area. These community-level organizations coordinate local response activities and often maintain notification systems for residents. Attending their preparedness events and training sessions provides valuable insights while integrating you into local emergency response networks.

Finally, develop personal notification systems to alert your extended network during emergencies. Create pre-written emergency messages in both English and Spanish that can be quickly sent to family, friends, employers, and essential contacts. Establish check-in protocols with trusted contacts who will alert authorities if you fail to make scheduled communications during known emergencies.

By systematically addressing these elements of emergency preparedness, expatriates in Costa Rica can develop resilience against the country's unique challenges while maintaining the peace of mind necessary to fully enjoy its remarkable benefits.

