

San José, Costa Rica

BY LISÉ STERN



Balmoral Hotel

and convenient walking distance to cafes, bars, restaurants, and museums.

Hotel Presidente

Avenida Central
506-2010-0000
hotel-presidente.com

Costa Rica is lush with vegetation and trees, and wood is a plentiful natural resource. The hotel lobby is abundant with teak, with comfortable chairs for lingering on your way to your room. Rooms vary in size, from cozy to spacious; all include Wi-Fi. A hot breakfast buffet comes with the room price, featuring local cuisine. Bicycles are available for exploring around town.

Balmoral Hotel

Avenida Central
506-2222-5022
balmoral.co.cr

Accommodations can be expensive, with gorgeous wood floors. Many rooms have an odd sort of enclosed balcony: the room has windows facing the balcony, which then has windows facing the street. It can be a pleasant space to enjoy a cup of coffee, and also acts as a sound block to the city noise when you close the doors. Wi-Fi is free, and breakfast is included, served in the ground-floor restaurant, a light, airy space, quiet even though it's on a busy street. Choose a table by the front for people watching.

STAY

Two hotels are located across the street from each other, in the heart of downtown San José



Coffee berries growing

Doka Estate Coffee

Sabanilla, Alajuela
506-2449-5152, dokaestate.com

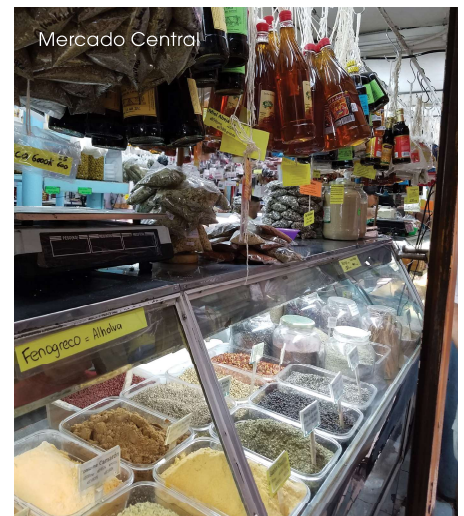
In Costa Rica, coffee is a way of life. There are eight different coffee growing regions, and San José has coffee houses with owners who are passionate about the beverage, using several different brewing methods to yield the optimum cup for that bean variety. But go to the source! Doka Estate is about 20 miles from downtown, up in the hills. It's a fascinating "seed to cup" tour that starts with seedlings and ends with sipping brews made from several of the estate's beans.

Mercado Central

Avenida Central
506-2547-6104

The Central Market is the place to go for foodie wanderings. There are two parts: one where you'll find exotic native produce, like guanábana (soursop, used in smoothies and juices) and marañón (the fruit of the cashew nut). The other is a labyrinth of stores, cafes, and eateries.

Not to miss is the La Sorbetera de Lolo Mora, an ice creamery that makes one flavor, a vanilla unlike any you've had. It's deep golden yellow, the consistency of gelato, with hints of cinnamon and other spices. You'll also find shops with homemade extracts and other condiments, as well as kitchen supplies, fresh roasted coffee, and more.



Mercado Central

DO

Museums of the Central Bank of Costa Rica

Calle 5
506-2243-4202,
museosdelbancocentral.org

Located under the Plaza de la Cultura and near the Teatro Nacional, this underground space in the center of downtown features the Gold Museum and the Numismatic Museum, plus galleries of local contemporary art. In the Gold Museum, an extensive collection of displays convey life in early Costa Rica, illustrating the many methods used to create objects from gold.



Costa Rica is a small country, less than 20,000 square miles, bordered by Nicaragua to the north, Panama to the south, the Caribbean Sea to the east, and the Pacific Ocean to the west; it boasts nearly eight dozen beaches. San José, the capital, is inland and far from the beaches—but a most worthwhile place to spend several days on any trip to the Central American country. It's a cosmopolitan center with compelling architecture and unique food finds, with passionate chefs and distinctive coffee houses, home to terrific restaurants, an easy base for visits to the coast or mountains. See VisitCostaRica.com for more info.

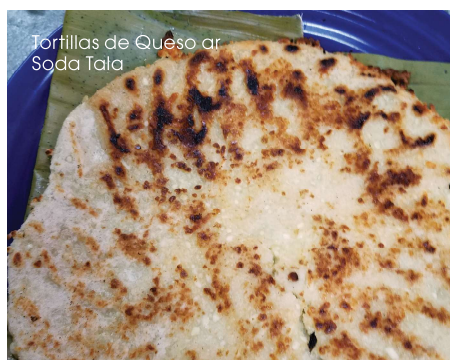
EAT

BREAKFAST

Soda Tala

Mercado Central
506-2222-8054

Sodas are roadside cafes that are located throughout Costa Rica. Soda Tala, located in the Mercado Central in downtown San José, serves up traditional cuisine for breakfast and lunch. It's open very early and is busy all day, tables full and shared with strangers, and everyone is friendly and hungry. Classic dishes include homemade **Tortillas de Queso**, thick cornmeal pancakes filled with cheese; **Gallo de Papas**, seasoned potatoes; and **Full Tala Pintos**, rice, beans, eggs, tortillas, and sausage or meat. Be sure to accompany the dish with classic Costa Rican drinks, **Refescos Naturales**, smoothies made with local fruit like mango and papaya.



Tortillas de Queso at Soda Tala

LUNCH

Manos en la Masa

150 norte de la Clínica La California
Calle 25, Avenidas 1 y 3
506-4035-6230, [facebook.com/manos.masa](https://www.facebook.com/manos.masa)

The farm-to-table concept is going strong in Costa Rica. Chef-owner Adriana Sánchez González, who is also a writer, goes one step further, featuring traditional Costa Rican dishes from all over the country, both



Ceviche de Pescado with blue cornmeal crackers at Al Mercat



Roasted Hearts of Palm at Manos en la Masa

showcasing classic preparations and using them to inspire new dishes. Manos is open for breakfast, lunch, and in between and after, with a bakery featuring homemade crusty loaves of bread and fantastic pound cakes and cookies. Savory entrees might include **Roasted Hearts of Palm**, served on a thick corn tortilla, **Chicken Posole**, and a deconstructed **Cheesecake** with guava jelly.

DINNER

Chateau 1525

Avenida 5, Calle 15
506-2233-2233, chateau1525.com
Chateau 1525 is a cooking school with a restaurant that applies French techniques to Costa Rican ingredients. Part of

the training is service, which is ultra-attentive—multiple waiters are ready to present each course, refill your glass, clear your plate. The food is gorgeously and creatively presented—a **salad of delicate baby greens** in a small mason jar, upended onto your plate. An incredibly velvety **Black Bean Soup**, poured steaming from a pitcher into a bowl placed in front of you, garnished with plantains and a sous vide egg. Dessert might be a chocolate-wrapped **Passion Fruit Mousse** on local pineapple carpaccio.

Al Mercat

Barrio Escalante, Avenida 13
506-2221-0783, almercat.com

The kitchen at Al Mercat is tiny, but it generates huge flavors. Much is grown from the eatery's farm, and décor is rustic, with a large long wooden table at the center of the upper level dining room. Start with strips of **fried plantains** served with several sauces. Expertly executed traditional dishes include a refreshing **Ceviche de Pescado**, served with homemade corn crackers, or **Chalupas**, small, thick corn tortillas topped with seasoned meat, fish, or vegetables.