

The Costa Rican Balancing Act

Is it possible to balance economic development and conservation?

Key vocabulary

Costa Rica A country in Central America.

biodiversity The shortened form of two words; "biological" and "diversity". It refers to all the variety of life that can be found on Earth (plants, animals, fungi and micro-organisms) as well as to the communities that they form and the habitats in which they live.

economy How a country or place is doing in producing and making goods, and how much money it has.

economic development The growth in standard of living of a nation's people from low income (poor) economy to a high income (rich) economy.

conservation The protection of things found in nature. It requires the sensible use of all Earth's natural resources: water, soil, minerals, wildlife, and forests.

sustainability Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

eco-tourism Catering for tourists wishing to experience the natural environment without damaging it or disturbing its habitats.

deforestation The removal of trees to make room for something that is not a forest.

Where is Costa Rica?

Costa Rica is a country in Central America. It borders Nicaragua and Panama and has two coastlines, one facing the Pacific Ocean and another facing the Caribbean Sea.



Why is Costa Rica's Rainforest Important?

Costa Rica accounts for only 0.03% of the Earth's surface. However it contains nearly 6% of the world's biodiversity. Its natural wealth, both in species and ecosystems, is partly explained by its geographical position. The unique geography of the area results in many different ecosystems in a small area. These include:

- .Tropical rainforests
- .Cloud forests
- .Dry forests
- .Swamps
- .Coral reefs

Nearly half a million species can be found in Costa Rica. Sloths, squirrel monkeys, toucans, jaguars, red eyed tree frogs, hummingbirds, iguanas, turtles and parrots are all native to Costa Rica.



Costa Rica's Economy

Costa Rica has shown a steady economic growth over the past 25 years. The main agricultural exports from the country include: coffee, cacao, sugar, rice, palm oil, bananas and pineapples. In fact, Costa Rica grows over 50% of the share of the world's pineapples. In recent years, The country has evolved from an economy that depended only on agriculture, to one that is more diverse, based on tourism, electronics, medical manufacturing and IT services.



What threats are there to Costa Rica's rainforest?

In the 1960s, Costa Rica began to experience rapid deforestation. The trees were cleared in order to create land that was used for banana and pineapple plantations and to graze cattle. By the 1980s, nearly 60% of Costa Rica's rainforest had been destroyed. This had a detrimental effect on the diversity of wildlife, caused flooding and may have even contributed to global warming.



Forest Reserves

The Costa Rican government has recognised the problem of deforestation and has been setting up protected areas of forest throughout the country. A forest reserve is an area protected from exploitation and is enforced by using environmental laws. Today, there are 28 National Parks (protected areas) and 24% of the country's land is protected.



Agro-forestry

This is a sustainable way of managing the rainforest. It relies on growing rainforest trees and commercial crops at the same time. This lets farmers take advantage of the shelter from the canopy of trees.



Eco-Tourism

Ecotourism is tourism which does not harm the environment, but instead benefits the local people and the environment. This is because Ecotourism provides a good source of income for local people, as they can act as guides or provide accommodation.

With its natural beauty and wildlife, Costa Rica draws in a lot of tourists. According to the Costa Rican government, 1.7 million people travel to Costa Rica every year. These tourists go to visit the forest reserves and even sleep in a cabin in the rainforest.

This tourism not only aims to provide beautiful natural experiences for tourists, but also to educate visitors about the importance of protecting natural resources.

