

## Tourism boom threatens Costa Rica eco-paradise

Adapted from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-costarica-environment-idUSN1733128420080620>

Pungent brown sewage seeps into the Pacific ocean. In the background, cranes put up hotels and beachfront apartments.

Once home to monkeys, turtles and other rare wildlife, this stretch of coast in northwest Costa Rica is developing so fast that it is tarnishing the country's reputation as a destination for eco-tourists.

Some 1.4 million people visit Central America's richest country every year, but they no longer come just for the national parks that cover more than a quarter of its area and are home to almost 5 percent of the world's plant and animal species. They also want sand, surf and even real estate.

The biggest stimulus came when the airport at nearby Liberia began handling international flights five years ago, putting the previously little-known Guanacaste province within, for example, three hours of Miami.

With tropical sunshine, sandy beaches and surf, developers saw a chance to attract everyone from surfers and honeymooners to U.S. retirees seeking a second home, transforming sleepy towns with names like Tamarindo, Quepos, Playas del Coco and Jaco.

The result is rampant construction that environmentalists fear could balloon into noisy, sprawling resorts with cruise ship ports and golf courses like those of Cancun, Mexico, which guzzle water and pollute the environment.

"These cases of poorly planned tourist developments in Costa Rica could affect the well-deserved reputation as a pioneer in eco-tourism," said Ronald Sanabria, a Costa Rican who works for the Rainforest Alliance, an international advocate for sustainability.

Already, Costa Rica has lost up to half of its monkey population in the last 12 years as developers expand into their jungle habitat, according to scientists at the University of Costa Rica.

Light pollution from Tamarindo is making life harder for leatherback turtles. The town's lights disorient the tiny hatchlings, sending them toward the luminescence instead of out to sea, where they are safer from predators.

"These large-scale tourism projects have big consequences for the environment," said Fabian Pacheco, of the Costa Rican Federation for the Conservation of Nature.

The issue is a familiar one in developing countries as they weigh the benefits of tourist dollars that come with high-rise hotels against the loss of greenery when virgin land is paved over.

Tourism is Costa Rica's top foreign exchange earner. Property developers point to the big contribution the construction sector makes to the economy, accounting for 5 percent of gross domestic product and growing by 16 percent last year.

The tourist boom has also created jobs in a poor region. "It's been good for the locals. Most of them are happy to have good, decent jobs," said Denise Shante, 51, a Canadian property broker who sells apartments priced up to \$2.5 million.

"Costa Rica can no longer project the pure image of an eco-tourism paradise since reality shows investors are free to develop more and more projects without clear rules," the Costa Rican Hotel and Resorts Association warned in a report in May.

President Oscar Arias, whose government wants to cut the country's net carbon emissions to zero by 2021, has begun a crackdown at newer Pacific resorts, closing some [businesses](#) and ordering height restrictions on buildings near the beach.

"Tamarindo and Jaco got out of our hands, but our scientists are working on ways of assuring development that is compatible with nature," Arias told Reuters.

The Costa Rican Chamber of Construction says unregulated building is still going on, and in Tamarindo the most prominent feature is its building sites swarming with laborers. The town, world-famous for its surf, bustles with surfers and tanned shoppers who fill its shops, bars and restaurants.

When rains overflowed septic tanks in Tamarindo, tones of raw sewage flowed into the ocean and the resort lost its "blue flag" issued to indicate healthy ocean water conditions.

## Projected growth in tourism could be a jolt for jobseekers

[Zach Dyer](#)

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<http://www.ticotimes.net/2014/03/24/projected-growth-in-tourism-could-be-a-jolt-for-jobseekers>

Things are looking up for the Costa Rican tourism sector and maybe Ticos looking for work in a tight job market, according to a new report released last week.

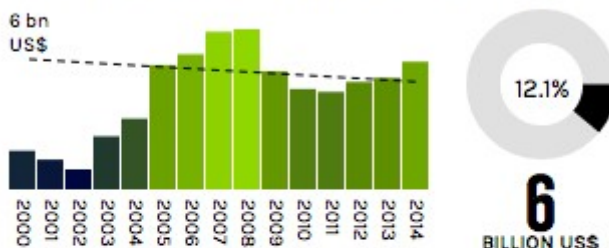
Costa Rica's world famous tourism sector is set to grow 5.8 percent during 2014, according to the latest [economic impact assessment](#) from the World Travel and Tourism Council.

The report estimated tourism's total contribution to the national economy added up to 12.1 percent of GDP in 2013 and prognosticated that tourism will make up 13.7 percent of Costa Rica's GDP by 2024.

Figures showing travel and tourism's contribution to Costa Rica's GDP and employment.  
Courtesy World Travel and Tourism Council

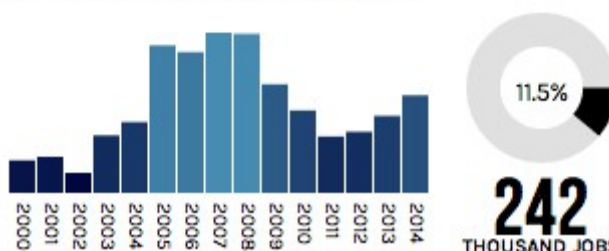
### ↕ TOTAL CONTRIBUTION TO GDP

In 2013, the total contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP was US\$ 5.9 billion (CRC 2976.6 bn) which is 12.1% of total GDP.



### ↕ TOTAL CONTRIBUTION TO EMPLOYMENT

In 2013 the Travel & Tourism sector supported 242 thousand jobs which is 11.5% of total employment.



Growth in tourism could be a boon to out-of-work Ticos. The WTTC estimates that growth in the leisure sector during 2014 will add 7.2 percent more jobs than in 2013, and 6.2 percent more to total employment. The travel organization estimates that Costa Rica could see the biggest bump in the Americas in 2014 for tourism-related jobs, far exceeding the regional average of 2 percent growth.

The WTTC findings [contrast](#) with a survey from the National Tourism Chamber from January that said 70 percent of tourism businesses did not plan on hiring more staff during peak tourism season between December and April, despite anticipated growth.

Costa Rica has the second highest [unemployment](#) rate in Latin America, behind Colombia, according to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. Unemployment in Costa Rica [fell](#) to 8.3 percent in the fourth quarter of 2013, according to the National Statistics and Census Institute, down from 9.8 during the same period in 2012.

The WTTC estimated that tourism and travel-related industries account for more than 11.5 percent of jobs in Costa Rica.

Costa Rica's tourism industry took a hard hit during the global financial crisis in 2008, but has seen improvement since 2011.

The tourism research organization also put some hard figures to something many U.S. travelers already know: Flying is too expensive.

The report noted that U.S. passengers pay more taxes on their flights — 20 percent — than “sin” goods, like firearms (10 percent) or liquor (11 percent). The organization argued that the travel and tourism industry bears a disproportionate tax burden in the United States, an average of 14 percent, compared to manufacturing (4 percent) and health care (11 percent).

The WTTC describes itself as a forum dedicated to promoting the economic impact of the travel and tourism industry.