

Costa Rica For Families

Despite the fact that I was the mother of three small children I was determined to keep exploring the world. International travel does not have to end when you have a family. You just have to pick your destinations very carefully, do your research and pack smart.

On the advice of a good friend I decided to take a family vacation to Costa Rica with my sons ages seven, five and three. It was an amazing experience; we had a great time, and would definitely recommend it to anyone traveling with small children.

Here are my tips for making Costa Rica a great family vacation:

Find a good travel company with a location in Costa Rica.

It is important that the company you use has local offices and that residents of the country are the ones booking your travel. They are the most knowledgeable about everything in Costa Rica and if you run into any problems there is local support.

Book a direct overnight flight.

On the advice of my pediatrician we flew at night and the boys slept most of the way there. While their dad and I arrived a little groggy, they were refreshed and in good spirits which made traveling with them easier.

Hire a car service to drive you around.

We booked a car service that picked us up at the airport and drove us from San Jose to the Arenal Volcano for an overnight stay. Then another driver shuttled us to the resort town, Tamarindo, on the coast. This worked out great. We did not have to remember to drive on the other side of the road nor decipher maps or signs in a foreign language. The best part about this was we were able to see the natural beauty that is Costa Rica and have a savvy interpreter with us at all times. We made several stops to check out a coffee plantation, watch howler monkeys

swing through the trees and take in a beautiful waterfall as we headed to our final destination.

Rent a condo with bedrooms, a kitchen and a laundry room.

It was great to have a kitchen and access to a washer and dryer with three little kids. We could enjoy stress free inexpensive meals and wash their clothes so we could pack lighter. We also had bedrooms with doors to be able to put the boys to bed and have some adult time. That would not have been possible in a hotel room.

Tamarindo was where we spent the majority of our vacation. It is a surfer's haven with warm water and big, beautiful waves. However, they break about 50 yards from the beach. The boys could wade into calm, warm water and play without me worrying about them getting crushed by a huge wave or taken out by a surfer. We also had a pool right out the back door of our condo so it was easy to keep the boys entertained and relax ourselves.

There are lots of adventures that are safe to take kids on. While we were there we hiked up a well-maintained trail with a guide to see the Arenal Volcano spew ash, rocks and lava. We took a canopy jungle tour and a leisurely river boat ride where we got to feed monkeys pieces of pineapple.

When the boys are older we will go back for ziplining and whitewater rafting or a horseback ride up to the edge of an active volcano.

To make your trip as stress free as possible, pay your exit fee before you leave the airport on the day you arrive. Get some local currency and learn a few common Spanish phrases to help you order a glass of milk, find the bathroom or thank your server.

Costa Rica is an affordable and family friendly vacation with lots to see and do even if your children are really small. It's one of those places you can return to year after year as the kids get older and never run out of fun family adventures.

