

## Country Profile

**COSTA RICA****GENERAL INFORMATION**

Costa Rica is located in Central America immediately to the north of Panama. The Caribbean coast is covered with dense, tropical jungles and is mostly uninhabited. The Pacific coast is less humid with many spectacular beaches, and the central highland valley offers a pleasant spring-like climate throughout the year.

Costa Rica is a developing nation but is in the upper half of the world's economies. Tourist facilities are good in San Jose and generally adequate in the remainder of the country. Adequate private medical care is available in San Jose but is not up to the standards of industrialized countries. Medical care is substandard outside San Jose.

Visa applicants may need to meet specific requirements. Review the application and contact Costa Rica's embassy if you have questions.

**VACCINES AND MALARIA**

- **Yellow fever:** Neither required nor recommended.
- **Other vaccines:**
  - **Hepatitis A**—*Recommended for:* all travelers.
  - **Hepatitis B**—*Recommended for:* prolonged stays; all health care workers; the possibility of a new sexual partner during stay. Increased awareness is recommended regarding safe sex and body fluid/blood precautions.
  - **Influenza**—Flu is transmitted year round in the tropics and all travelers are at increased risk. *Recommended for:* all travelers over age 50; children ages 6-59 months and close contacts of children 0-59 months; all travelers of any age with any chronic or immunocompromising conditions; women who will be pregnant at any time during the influenza season. Consider for any traveler wishing to decrease risk of influenza or non-specific respiratory illness. Consider oseltamivir/zanamivir as standby therapy or prophylaxis for those inadequately immunized.
  - **Rabies**—Risk occurs in limited areas. No canine cases have been reported in at least 10 years. *Recommended for:* occupational exposure only. Bat bites or scratches while in this country should be taken seriously and post-exposure prophylaxis sought even in those already immunized.
  - **Typhoid**—*Recommended for:* adventurous dietary habits; prolonged stays; travel (especially in rural areas) outside of common tourist packages and other pre-arranged fixed itineraries. Consider for all risk-averse travelers desiring maximum pre-travel preparation.
  - **Routine vaccinations** (adults only)
    - **Measles.** Indicated for those born in 1957 or later (1970 or later in Canada) without history of disease or of 2 adequate doses of live vaccine at any time during their life. Many countries (including the U.K.) recommend that adults need to have had only 1 countable dose at any time during their life.
    - **Pneumococcal.** All adults over 65 and those with chronic disease or compromising conditions.
    - **Polio.** Adult polio boosters are unnecessary for travel anywhere in South and Central America.
    - **Tetanus/diphtheria.** Adequate primary series plus 1 dose of Td (or Tdap) within the last 10 years. Adults who have not received at least 1 previous dose of any acellular pertussis-containing vaccine should receive Tdap vaccine at least once, in place of a Td booster.
    - **Varicella.** Indicated for all persons born outside the U.S. or born in the U.S. after 1979, except not indicated for persons with an adequate vaccination history (2 lifetime doses), reliable evidence of previous infection, or laboratory confirmation of immunity.
- **Malaria:**
  - Risk (almost exclusively *P. vivax*) exists in rural lowland areas in Alajuela, Guanacaste, Heredia, and Limon provinces. There is no risk in the following tourist areas: San Jose and surrounding towns, Monteverde, Arenal volcano, Manuel Antonio National Park, San Ramon Forest Reserve, Rincon de la Vieja National Park, Braulio Carrillo National Park, Chirripo National Park, and La Amistad International Park. Cases of *P. falciparum* are mostly imported by migrant workers from Nicaragua.
  - Take evening and nighttime insect precautions in risk areas. The medicine chloroquine protects against malaria in this area. The best drug for you depends on your itinerary and on a number of personal factors that should be discussed between you and your health care provider.
  - Because no preventive measure is 100% effective, if you have traveled in an area of malaria risk, seek immediate medical attention for any fever or flu-like illness occurring within 3 months of your return

home. Be sure to tell your health care provider your travel history.

## OTHER HEALTH ISSUES

- **Insect-borne diseases:** Mosquitoes and flies transmit a variety of diseases in this country, including malaria, dengue fever, and leishmaniasis. Personal protective measures are extremely important since insects cannot be avoided.
- **Food- and water-borne diseases:** Quite a few diseases, including hepatitis A and typhoid fever, are transmitted by unsanitary food handling procedures and contaminated water. Food and beverage precautions are essential in order to reduce chance of illness. Anti-diarrheal drugs (loperamide and/or a quinolone antibiotic) may be prescribed by your provider.
- Leptospirosis outbreaks have been reported in river rafters. Risk to travelers is unknown.

## TRAVEL ADVISORY

*The material below has been compiled or quoted verbatim from the consular Web sites of the United States (travel.state.gov), United Kingdom (www.fco.gov.uk/travel), Canada (voyage.dfait-maeci.gc.ca), and Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/consular/advice). Standard safety precautions that apply to all international travel are not included in this advisory. Please refer to the "Safety and Security" handout for standard precautions.*

### Crime

Crime is increasing and tourists are frequent victims. Security risks are heightened in the capital city of San Jose. Criminals usually operate in small groups and gang muggings can occur even in daylight on busy streets. While most crimes are non-violent, criminals (including juveniles) have shown a greater tendency in recent years to use violence and to carry weapons. All criminals should be considered armed; if challenged or threatened, they will quickly use their weapons. Visitors should walk or exercise with a companion, and should bear in mind that crowded tourist attractions and resort areas popular with foreign tourists are also common venues for criminal activities. Travelers should avoid responding to verbal harassment, and should not carry large amounts of cash, jewelry, or expensive photographic equipment.

In recent years, several Westerners have been murdered in Costa Rica in urban, rural, and resort locations. Westerners have been victims of sexual assaults both in cities and in rural areas. In some of these cases, the victim has known the assailant. Although unusual, there have been kidnappings of foreigners reported over the past several years. Some of these cases have been so-called "express kidnappings," in which victims are held for several hours as the kidnappers transport them to various automated teller machines to withdraw money.

There are daily reports of valuables, identity documents, and other items stolen from locked vehicles. In many of these cases, the stolen items were hidden under the seat, in the glove compartment, or secured in the trunk. Thefts from parked cars commonly occur in downtown San Jose, at beaches, in the airport and bus station parking lots, and at national parks and other tourist attractions. When traveling by bus, avoid putting bags or other personal belongings in the storage bins. Thieves will take property from the bins when the bus makes its periodic stops. Have belongings in your line of sight or in your possession at all times. There has been an increase in armed attacks on tourists leaving the airport in hire cars.

Travelers should avoid areas with high concentrations of bars and nightclubs, especially at night, and should also steer clear of deserted properties or undeveloped land. It is safer to seek entertainment in groups, especially in urban areas. Avoid leaving unattended drinks in bars and places of entertainment; reports have been received of "spiked" drinks resulting in assault and theft.

Carjackings have increased, and motorists have been confronted at gunpoint while stopped at traffic lights or upon arrival at their homes. Late model sports utility vehicles and high-end car models are popular with carjackers. One method of initiating kidnappings and carjackings is to bump the victim's car from behind; the unsuspecting victim stops, and is taken hostage. There have also been incidents where slashed tires have given thieves the opportunity to "assist" in changing tyres, while an accomplice steals from the car. Before renting a car, travelers should ask the rental company their specific policy regarding damage to a tire or wheel rim due to driving on a flat tire.

Costa Rica has a 911 system for reporting emergencies. Crimes that are no longer in progress should be reported in person at the nearest police station.

### Travel

Costa Rica has one of the highest traffic accident rates in the world. Traffic laws and speed limits are often

ignored; turns across 1 or 2 lanes of traffic are common, and pedestrians generally are not given the right of way. All passengers are required by law to wear seat belts.

Although improving, roads are often in poor condition, and large potholes with the potential to cause significant damage to vehicles are common. Traffic signs, even on major highways, are often inadequate. Poor visibility because of heavy fog or rain makes driving at night especially treacherous. Landslides in the wet season, which block the road between San Jose and Guapiles on the way to Limon, are frequent and can cause delays.

All types of motor vehicles are appropriate for the main highways and principal roads in the major cities. However, many roads to beaches and other rural locations are not paved, and some out-of-the-way destinations are accessible only with high clearance, rugged suspension four wheel-drive-vehicles. Travelers are advised to call ahead to their hotels to ask about the current status of access roads.

Traffic enforcement in Costa Rica is the responsibility of the Transit Police ("Transitos"), who are distinguished by a light blue uniform shirt and dark blue trousers. They use light blue cars or motorcycles equipped with blue lights. They often wave vehicles to the roadside for inspection. Drivers are commonly asked to produce a driver's license, vehicle registration and insurance information. Third-party coverage is mandatory in Costa Rica. Infractions will result in the issuance of a summons. Fines are not supposed to be collected on the spot, although reports of officers attempting to collect money are common.

In the event of a traffic accident, vehicles must be left where they are, and not moved out of the way. Travelers are advised to remain in their car until police arrive. Both the Transit Police and the Insurance Investigator must make accident reports before the vehicles are moved. Although sometimes slow to respond after notification, these officials will come to the accident scene.

Terms and conditions of car rentals in Costa Rica can be different from what foreigners are used to. They should carefully review contracts and, in particular, be aware of the mandatory insurance liability coverage. Many driving situations can nullify insurance. Rental vehicles are distinguishable by their license plates.

Public bus transportation is chaotic and uncomfortable but inexpensive. Police checks of public transportation occur. These checks are often used to determine whether foreigners have overstayed the 1 or 3 month visa exemption period.

There have been several sexual assaults by taxi drivers. Travelers should be careful to use licensed taxis, which are red and have medallions (yellow triangles containing numbers) painted on the side. Licensed taxis at the airport are painted orange, rather than red. All taxis should have working door handles, locks, meters (called "marias"), and seatbelts. Passengers should not ride in the front seat with the driver. If the taxi meter is not working, a price should be agreed upon before the trip begins. Taxi vouchers (fixed prices) can be purchased at the official taxi stand located in front of the airport building.

Since 2000, as a result of domestic air accidents in Costa Rica, a number of foreigners have died. Private air taxi services have also crashed. Local investigations have judged pilot error to be the cause in the majority of the accidents. The Costa Rican government has dedicated increased resources to the oversight of the pilots, procedures, and aircraft of air taxi operators.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration has assessed this country's civil aviation authority and determined that it licenses and oversees air carriers in accordance with aviation safety standards established by the International Civil Aviation Organization.

### **Other**

Costa Rica customs authorities may enforce strict regulations concerning temporary importation into or export from Costa Rica of items such as cars, household effects, and merchandise. These regulations can be quite complicated and include the application of local tax laws.

In addition, Costa Rican customs officials often require documentation that has been certified by the Costa Rican Embassy/Consulate in the country of origin. This is especially true for automobiles that are to be imported. The government of Costa Rica has instituted strict emissions requirements for these cars and will not release them without an emissions statement from the country of origin.

Costa Rica is located in an earthquake, hurricane, and volcanic zone. Costa Rica is also a country of microclimates and travelers to Costa Rica should check the projected rainfall amounts for the area in Costa Rica they intend to visit. Serious flooding occurs annually on the Caribbean side near the port city of Limon, but flooding

could occur in other parts of Costa Rica as well, depending on the time of year and projected rainfall in that region.

Currents are swift and dangerous on both the Caribbean and Pacific coasts. Rip tides are very common. There are no lifeguards or signs warning of dangerous conditions. Several drownings occur each year. Safety features on small boats are not always reliable.

Adventure tourism is increasingly popular in Costa Rica, and many companies provide whitewater rafting, bungee jumping, jungle canopy tours, and other outdoor attractions. Visitors are urged to use caution in selecting adventure tourism companies, and are advised to avoid small, "cut-rate" companies that do not have the track record of more established outfitters. Guided tourists have died while whitewater rafting and while hiking near the mouths of active volcanoes. The government of Costa Rica has passed legislation to regulate and monitor the safety of adventure tourism companies; enforcement of these laws is overseen by the Ministry of Health. To be granted official operating permits, registered tourism companies must meet safety standards and have insurance coverage. Tourists hiking in the jungles should be especially careful to hire experienced guides.

Due to irregular enforcement of property rights, investors should exercise extreme caution before investing in real estate.

The Costa Rican government has announced an aggressive program to discourage sexual tourism and to punish severely those who engage in sexual activity with minors. Soliciting the services of a minor for sexual purposes is illegal in Costa Rica and is punishable by imprisonment. Photography of children must be approved by the parent, as there is concern that such photography may result in the child being identified either for child prostitution or for snatching.

Penalties for possession, use, or trafficking in illegal drugs in Costa Rica are strict, and convicted offenders can expect lengthy jail sentences and fines. In addition to the criminal penalties they may face, tourists who purchase or sell illegal drugs or use the services of prostitutes greatly increase their risk of personal harm. Several Westerners have died in Costa Rica in recent years in incidents related to drug use or patronage of prostitutes. Under Costa Rican law, suspects in criminal cases may be held in jail until the investigation is completed and the prosecutor is ready to proceed to trial. This pretrial detention can last two years, and in some cases, longer.

Demonstrations and strikes, related to labor disputes or other local issues, occur. Strikes have resulted in roadblocks and sporadic gasoline shortages.

The currency is the Costa Rican colon (CRC). To avoid complications, carry U.S. dollars or colones. Money changers on the street have been known to pass off counterfeit U.S. dollars and local currency. Credit card fraud (either using stolen credit cards or the account number alone following copying of the number) is on the rise. Travelers should retain all their credit card receipts and check their accounts regularly to help prevent unauthorized use of their credit cards. Avoid using debit cards for point-of-sale purchases, as a skimmed number can be used to clean out an account. Access to cash via ATM's is available in major cities. Only local currency can be withdrawn.

The official language is Spanish. English is not widely spoken outside major hotels. Very few public service providers (e.g., police, lawyers, hospitals) are able to communicate in English or French.

## **Consular Information**

### **Selected Embassies or Consulates in Costa Rica**

- U.S. Embassy: Pavas, San Jose (Tel.: 506-519-2000; Web: [sanjose.usembassy.gov](http://sanjose.usembassy.gov))
- Canadian Embassy: La Sabana Executive Business Centre, Building No. 5, 3rd Floor, P.O. Box 351-1007, San Jose (Tel.: 506-242-4400; Fax: 506-242-4410; E-mail: [sjcra@international.gc.ca](mailto:sjcra@international.gc.ca); Web: [www.sanjose.gc.ca](http://www.sanjose.gc.ca))
- U.K. Embassy: Apartado 815-1007, Edificio Centro Colon (11th Floor), San Jose (Tel.: 506-258-2025; Fax: 506-233-9938; E-mail: [britemb@racsa.co.cr](mailto:britemb@racsa.co.cr); Web: [www.britishembassycr.com](http://www.britishembassycr.com))

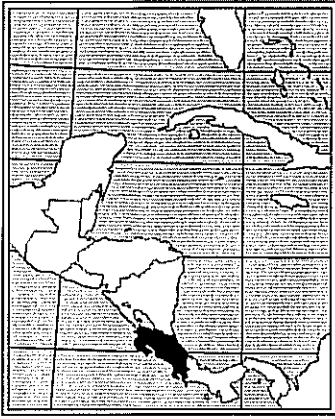
### **Costa Rica's Embassies or Consulates in Selected Countries**

- In the U.S.: 2112 S Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008 (Tel.: 202-328-6628; Fax: 202-234-6950; Web: [www.costarica-embassy.org](http://www.costarica-embassy.org))
- In Canada: 325 Dalhousie Street, Suite 407, Ottawa, ON, K1N 7G2 (Tel.: 613-562-2855; Fax: 613-562-2582; E-mail: [embcrca@travel-net.com](mailto:embcrca@travel-net.com))
- In the U.K.: Flat 1, 14 Lancaster Gate, London W2 3LH (Tel.: 020-7706-8844; Fax: 020-7706-8655; E-mail: [costaricanembassy@btconnect.com](mailto:costaricanembassy@btconnect.com); Web: [costarica.embassyhomepage.com](http://costarica.embassyhomepage.com))

- In Australia: Level 11, De La Sala House, 30 Clarence Street, GPO Box 2513, Sydney NSW 2000 (Tel.: 02-9261-1177, 0418-287771; Fax: 02-9261-2953)





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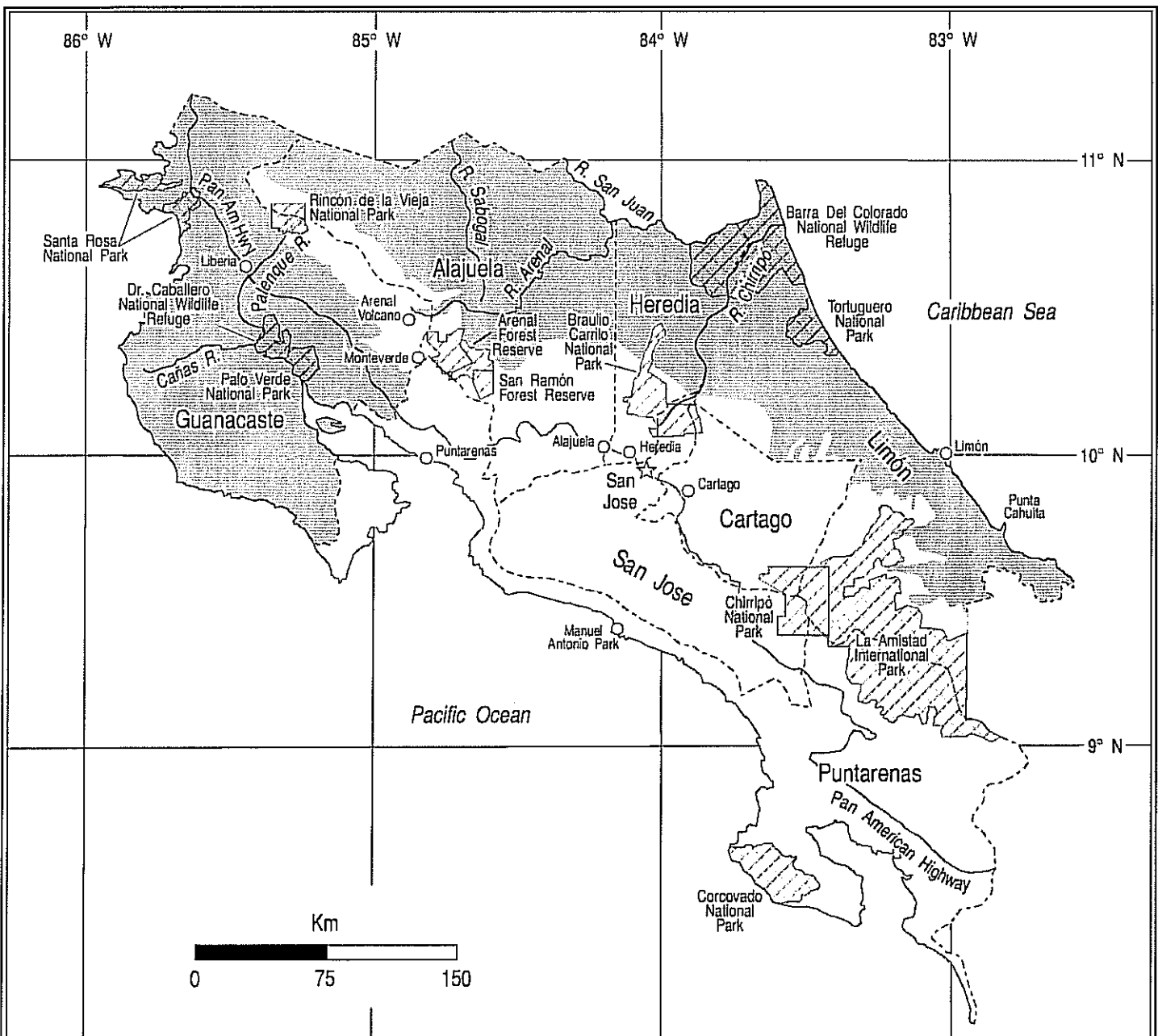


**Risk areas:** Risk (almost exclusively *P. vivax*) exists in rural lowland areas in Alajuela, Guanacaste, Heredia, and Limón provinces. There is no risk in the following tourist areas: San José and surrounding towns, Monteverde, Arenal volcano, Manuel Antonio National Park, San Ramón Forest Reserve, Rincón de la Vieja National Park, Braulio Carrillo National Park, Chirripó National Park, and La Amistad International Park. Cases of *P. falciparum* are mostly imported by migrant workers from Nicaragua.

**Protective measures:** The medicine chloroquine protects against malaria in this area. The best drug for you depends on your itinerary and on a number of personal factors that should be discussed between you and your health care provider.

Key	
	Malaria Risk Area
	National Park/Reserve
	Malaria risk is not reported to exist in city
	Malaria risk exists in city

Note: A star denotes the national capital.



# PRICE LIST FOR TRAVEL IMMUNIZATIONS AND MEDICATIONS

## MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENT HEALTH SERVICE

❖ ALL PRICES MAY VARY SLIGHTLY FROM THIS LISTING ❖

### VACCINATIONS

Hepatitis A (series of 2)	\$25.00 / injection
Hepatitis B (series of 3)	\$26.00 / injection
Polio (IPV)	\$34.35
Typhoid VI (injection)	N/A
Typhoid Oral Vaccine	\$41.20
Meningitis	\$87.00
Influenza ("Flu")	\$15.00
Japanese Encephalitis	\$276 / series (not in stock but we can order)
Varicella (Chickenpox) (series of 2)	\$65.00 / injection
Rabies, pre-exposure (series of 3)	\$445/series *varies* (not in stock but we can order)

❖❖❖ **Yellow Fever Vaccination** is available only at the Gallatin County Health Department, by *appointment only*. Telephone # 582-3100. Cost is approximately \$90. The immunization lasts for 10 years. Be sure to bring your yellow International Certificate of Vaccination with you to your appointment, as this will become your official record of Yellow Fever Vaccination. ❖❖❖

### ROUTINE IMMUNIZATIONS

These are updated only as needed

MMR	\$50.00
Measles (Rubeola)	\$16.00
Mumps	\$25.00
Rubella	\$22.00
Tetanus / Diphtheria	\$24.00
Tetanus / Diphtheria / Pertussis	\$39.00
PPD (TB skin test)	\$8.00

### ORAL MEDICATIONS

#### **For Malaria Prevention :**

Atavaquone / Proguanil (Malarone)	\$4.90 / tablet
Chloroquine (Aralen)	\$3.00 / tablet
Doxycycline 100mg	\$6.00 / 30 days
Mefloquine (Lariam)	\$7.00 / tablet

❖ These medications are started prior to arrival in the malarious area and they need to be continued for a period of time following your departure from the malarious area. The number you are prescribed is based on your travel itinerary. Some of the medications are taken once a week and others are taken every day. One medication only is selected for use. Please see your travel consultant for details. ❖

#### **For Travelers Diarrhea Treatment:**

Please see your travel consultant for specific instructions regarding appropriate use

Ciprofloxacin 500 mg	\$10.00 / 12 pills
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# MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY TRAVEL HEALTH RESOURCES

2007

## WEB-BASED RESOURCES

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) : excellent resource for general health, safety, and disease information including great up-to-date information on Avian Flu, security alerts, etc

[www.tripprep.com](http://www.tripprep.com) : outstanding resource for country-specific information and recommendations as well as frequently-updated travel advisories

[www.montana.edu/wwwhs/travel/home.htm](http://www.montana.edu/wwwhs/travel/home.htm) : our own website, with lots of additional resources included

[www.diversalertnetwork.org](http://www.diversalertnetwork.org) : very valuable resource for divers and excellent evacuation insurance (for non-diving emergencies as well) available through this Duke University based organization

[www.sentex.net/~iamat](http://www.sentex.net/~iamat) : great information on health care facilities abroad

## SUPPLIES

Chinook Travel and Medical Gear  
[www.chinookmed.com](http://www.chinookmed.com) or 970-375-6343

Travel Medicine, Inc.  
[www.travmed.com](http://www.travmed.com) or 800-872-8633

\*The above listings do not constitute an endorsement of any of the organizations or companies listed.\*

\* International Travel Health Clinic\*  
\* Montana State University Student Health Service \* Bozeman, Montana \* 406-994-2311 \*

# PRE - TRAVEL CHECKLIST

## 3-6 MONTHS PRIOR TO DEPARTURE :

- Attend Travel Health Class
- Review Travel Packet contents
- Schedule appointment with travel consultant
- Attend appointment and receive immunizations, prescriptions, country articles
- Schedule Yellow Fever Vaccination at Gallatin County Health Dept if needed (582-3100)
- Get eyeglasses and extra contact lenses if needed
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## 1-3 MONTHS PRIOR TO DEPARTURE:

- Assemble First Aid / Personal Needs Trip Kit
- Check insurance coverage, including evacuation coverage
- Make copies of important documents; leave one set with folks here and bring one with you
- Pick up travel medications and receive Hepatitis B #2, any remaining immunizations
- Get insect repellent, permethrin, sunscreen, lip protectant if needed
- Obtain refills of any chronic medications you will need to bring (including EpiPens if needed)
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# POST - TRAVEL CHECKLIST

- Get Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B boosters if indicated
- Get TB skin test if indicated
- See a health care provider if you
  - Develop a fever or flu-like symptoms within 6 months of returning
  - Have ongoing or worrisome symptoms such as diarrhea or weight loss
  - Had suspected malaria
  - Develop any unusual skin lesions
  - Engaged in any high-risk activities while abroad such as sexual contact with a previously unknown partner, got tattooed, received a blood transfusion, had blood / body fluid contact with an unknown source, had an encounter with a wild, feral or stray animal, etc
  - Make sure to give your travel history to the provider you see!!!*
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# TRIP KIT CHECKLIST

BRING	ITEM	COMMENTS	PACKED
	adhesive bandages (ie, band-aids) or gauze and tape		
	alcohol swabs for disinfection, in individual packets		
	antibacterial soap, hand wipes, or waterless gel		
	antibiotic and antifungal ointments, creams, or powders		
	antihistamines (e.g., Benadryl, Claritin) for allergic reactions		
	antimotility medication (e.g., Imodium, Lomotil)		
	bandage rolls (Ace wraps) for strains and sprains		
	batteries		
	birth control method and / or condoms (if applicable)		
	bismuth subsalicylate (e.g., Pepto Bismol) for intestinal distress		
	candle and matches		
	cough syrup and / or throat lozenges		
	disinfectant for cuts and scrapes		
	electrical plug adapter and / or current converter		
	epinephrine self-injection (if needed) and letter to accompany		
	facial tissues (e.g., Kleenex) in small packets		
	flashlight and batteries		
	hydrocortisone cream (OTC, 1%) for itching, insect bites, skin irritation)		
	insect repellent with DEET		
	insecticide with permethrin for clothing, netting, other fabrics		
	laxative / stool softener		
	mosquito netting		
	oral rehydration salts (or equivalent) for diarrhea, dehydration / Emergen-C		
	pain relievers (e.g., ibuprofen, acetaminophen, etc)		
	prescription medications (In original bottle with original label)		
	scissors		
	spare glasses, contact lenses, cleaning / wetting solutions		
	sunglasses		
	sunscreen (at least SPF 15 or higher) and also sunscreen for lip protection		
	tampons or sanitary napkins		
	thermometer		
	tweezers		
	vitamins / supplements		
	water purification supplies (e.g., filter, iodine (or similar) tablets, heating coil, etc)		
	and of course, duct tape!		