

# Costa Rica

## Country Overview



**Language:** Spanish & English

**Religion:** Roman Catholic (76%),  
Evangelical (14%), Jehovah's Witness

**Currency:** Costa Rican colon

**Capital:** San Jose

**Government:** Democratic Republic

**President:** Laura Chinchilla Miranda

**GDP:** Agriculture (6%), Industry  
(18%), Services (76%)

**Population below poverty line:** 22%

**Willow Creek Partner:** Red Viva  
Costa Rica

**Location:** San Jose

**Environment:** Urban

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[www.willowcreek.org/global/  
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## Background

Initial attempts at colonizing Costa Rica by the Spanish were unsuccessful due to disease, harsh climate, resistance by natives, and pirate raids. The Spanish successfully colonized the area in 1561 until 1821 when Costa Rica gained independence. Since independence there have been two brief periods of violence, but they ultimately led to the development of democracy. Then in 1949, the government decided to eliminate their military force and have remained a peaceful country ever since. Costa Rica is a unique country in Central America due to its political stability, high standard of living and well-developed social systems. Since 1970, the government has annually committed almost 20% of its GDP to universal education, health care, clean water and other social programs. The economy is comprised of an agriculture sector as well as strong technology and tourism industries. The stability in Costa Rica has made it a popular regional immigration destination.

## Education & Youth

- ◆ Education is free and mandatory by law, but there are still barriers for children to attend school.
- ◆ According to the annual assessment of public education, 41.2% of children up to 6 years old live in homes with parents who have less than six years of schooling.
- ◆ Households with fewer years of schooling tend to have lower income and their children are less likely to attend or graduate high school.
- ◆ Urban areas with high indigenous & migrant populations have a lower rate of school attendance.
- ◆ Other problems facing children include child sex tourism and forced domestic labor.

## About Willow's Partner: Red Viva

Willow Creek partners with a NGO called Red Viva that is located in San Jose and works in the coastal and agricultural communities in the Northeast. The areas Red Viva works in have extremely high rates of poverty and large migrant and indigenous populations. Red Viva identifies churches and assists them by increasing their capacity to care for vulnerable children in the local communities. Additionally, they provide support and coaching to help churches reach their communities.