

# Costa Rica Food Guide: 30+ Things To Eat In Costa Rica & Where And When To Eat Them

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## Who's hungry for some Costa Rican food?

To many travelers, eating Costa Rican food is a bit like jumping off the edge of a cliff into a dark and unfamiliar pool of water hundreds of meters below. If you've never done it before, you're probably half excited, half terrified, and wholeheartedly curious. Though your first time may be unnerving, hang in there; the experience is well worth the plunge. **As part of our Costa Rica food guide, the article below details more than 30 of the best things to eat in Costa Rica, including traditional meals, delicious desserts, and popular snacks.** Are you up for the culinary adventure?

If you're a vegetarian, vegan, or gluten-free traveler, don't miss our related blog posts:

*[Vegetarian And Vegan Dining In Costa Rica](#)*

*[Gluten-Free Dining In Costa Rica](#)*

Listed in alphabetical order below are our recommendations for some of **the best things to eat in Costa Rica**. *Buen provecho!* (Bon appetit!)

## ***Arroz con leche* (rice pudding)**

A typical Costa Rican dessert

*Arroz con leche* (rice with milk) is **a popular Costa Rican dessert** that's both delectable and affordable. It's typically comprised of cooked white rice, cow's milk, evaporated milk, sugar, vanilla, and spices, including

cinnamon, nutmeg, and *clavo de olor* (cloves). Raisins are sometimes added.

**This dish tastes slightly different from place to place in Costa Rica.**

Some Ticas (Costa Rican women) prepare *arroz con leche* with super-soft rice and extra milk which creates a creamy, almost soup-like dessert. My favorite helping of *arroz con leche* had slightly undercooked rice and a below-average amount of milk. Though the batch was somewhat dry, it allowed the spices to stand out and made for a delightfully flavorful dish.

### Where to try *arroz con leche* in Costa Rica

Several typical Costa Rican restaurants (called *sodas*) list *arroz con leche* on their dessert menu. **Some will automatically serve a small, complimentary bowl of the treat immediately following lunch or dinner served at their establishment.** If you're a local, don't turn away door-to-door salespeople selling cups of the stuff in a portable cooler. It's some of the best *arroz con leche* I've ever tasted.

### How to pronounce *arroz con leche*

AH-ROSE / CAHN / LAY-CHAY

- Arroz: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables
  - Con: 1 syllable
  - Leche: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables
-

## ***Arroz con pollo, carne, cerdo, pescado, or vegetales*** (rice with chicken, beef, pork, fish, or vegetables)

What is *arroz*? A typical Costa Rican lunch or dinner.

Some of the most popular things to eat in Costa Rica are **rice dishes**. Various types of meat, fish, and vegetables can be ordered to accompany the starchy carbohydrate. Menus usually list these plates as *arroz con pollo* (rice with chicken), *arroz con carne* (rice with beef), *arroz con cerdo* (rice with pork), *arroz con pescado* (rice with fish), or *arroz con vegetales* (rice with vegetables).

If you order one of these dishes, you'll receive **a plate of rice mixed with a source of protein (or a helping of vegetables)**, such as chicken, beef, pork, or fish. Oil or butter, as well as achiote ("annatto", which gives the rice a yellow color and a hint of flavor), is added to the preparation. **A few side dishes, which vary from day to day and across establishments, accompany the rice and meat, fish, or vegetable blend.**

If you'd rather not have meat, fish, or vegetables cut finely and mixed in with rice, or if you'd rather eat meat, fish, or vegetables with a side of plain white rice (without *achiote*), don't order a dish that begins with "*arroz con*". Instead, **order a *casado*** (see below for more information about *casados*) **or a plate of meat, fish, or vegetables on its own.** (See the bottom of this post for more information about meat, fish, and vegetable plates.)

Where to try *arroz con pollo*, *carne*, *cerdo*, *pescado*, or *vegetales* in Costa Rica

Most restaurants in Costa Rica that cook Costa Rican cuisine can prepare "*arroz con...*" dishes. More specifically, **you're guaranteed to get one of these authentic Costa Rican meals at an affordable price at a *soda* restaurant.** I have yet to come across a *soda* in Costa Rica that doesn't offer them.

How to pronounce *arroz con pollo*

AH-ROSE / CAHN / POY-YOH

- Arroz: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables
- Con: 1 syllable
- Pollo: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables

How to pronounce *arroz con carne*

AH-ROSE / CAHN / CAHR-NAY

- Arroz: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables
- Con: 1 syllable
- Carne: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables

### How to pronounce *arroz con cerdo*

AH-ROSE / CAHN / SAIR-DOH

- Arroz: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables
- Con: 1 syllable
- Cerdo: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables

### How to pronounce *arroz con pescado*

AH-ROSE / CAHN / PAYS-CAH-DOH

- Arroz: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables
- Con: 1 syllable
- Pescado: 3 syllables / light emphasis on the second syllable

### How to pronounce *arroz con vegetales*

AH-ROSE / CAHN / BAY-HAY-TAH-LAYS

- Arroz: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables
- Con: 1 syllable

- Vegetales: 4 syllables / equal emphasis on all syllables
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## **Cacao (chocolate)**

What is *cacao*? A typical Costa Rican dessert.

Mmmm chocolate. If you're like most people who enjoy indulging in chocolatey snacks, **you'll love eating chocolate produced right here in Costa Rica**. Do you know that you can taste *cacao*—the foundation of chocolate—in Costa Rica? If you take a chocolate tour, you can learn for yourself that white, fibrous, slimy *cacao* seeds look and taste nothing like store-bought chocolate.

## Where to try *cacao* in Costa Rica

**The best way to taste raw, unprocessed *cacao* is to participate in a chocolate tour.** Several destinations in Costa Rica offer them, including La Fortuna, Monteverde, Puerto Viejo de Talamanca, Puerto Jimenez, rake Bay, and Brasilito, to name a few. If you want to eat chocolate (i.e., the processed end form of *cacao*), you can pick up chocolate bars made in Costa Rica from a variety of grocery stores, cafes, souvenir shops, and chocolate tour offices.

## How to pronounce *cacao*

CAH-CAHO

- Cacao: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables
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***Casado* (rice and beans with other side dishes)**



What is *casado*? A typical Costa Rican lunch or dinner.

Want to dine like a Tico? Doing so is easy; simply order a *casado*. Literally, *casado* means “married,” and the translation is fitting because **the popular Costa Rican dish serves rice and beans beside each other on a plate**. If you want to include meat, fish, or vegetables with your meal, you can order *casado con pollo* (*casado* with chicken), *casado con carne* (*casado* with beef), *casado con cerdo* (*casado* with pork), *casado con pescado* (*casado* with fish), or *casado vegetariano* (vegetarian *casado*).

**Casados are always accompanied by two, three, or four side dishes**, which vary from day to day and across establishments. Popular *casado* side dish options include *ensaladas* (salads, such as green salad, pasta salad, and Russian salad—more on these below), *vegetales mixtas* (mixed vegetables), *aguacate* (avocado), *pure de papas* (mashed potatoes), *platanos fritos* (fried plantains), nacho chips, French fries, hard-boiled eggs, and tortillas.

Unlike *gallo pinto*, which sees rice and beans mixed together on a plate and served for breakfast (see the *gallo pinto* section below for more information), **casados always deliver white rice and either red or black beans separately on a plate for lunch or dinner.**

### Where to try *casado* in Costa Rica

All Costa Rican restaurants that serve Costa Rican cuisine—from authentic *soda* restaurants to more touristy establishments—offer the option to order *casado*.

### How to pronounce *casado*

CAH-SAH-DOH

- Casado: 3 syllables / light emphasis on the second syllable
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## Ceviche (raw fish soup)

What is *ceviche*? A typical Costa Rican lunch, dinner, or snack.

Do you love **acidic** eats? If so, don't leave Costa Rica without trying *ceviche*, a **tangy dish comprised of diced raw fish marinated in lemon**, then tossed with spices and vegetables.

Where to try *ceviche* in Costa Rica

*Ceviche* is fairly easy to find in Costa Rica. **Nearly all types of restaurants sell it**, including small *soda* restaurants and larger, fancier establishments. If you stroll around popular Costa Rican beaches, there's a good chance you'll come across **beach vendors selling ceviche from carts on the sand**. If you order *ceviche* from a restaurant, expect to receive it in a bowl or an elongated dish. If you buy it from the beach, you'll eat it straight out of a plastic cup.

How to pronounce *ceviche*

SAY-BEE-CHAY

- Ceviche: 3 syllables / light emphasis on the second syllable
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**Chicharrones (fried pork rinds)**

What are *chicharrones*? A typical Costa Rican lunch, dinner, or snack.

*Chicharrones*—fried pork rinds—are the favorite meal or snack of many Costa Rican meat-lovers. After cooking in a vat of oil and their own fat, ***chicharrones*, which can be soft or crunchy to eat depending on which part of the pig is cooked, become flavorful finger foods.** Though some restaurants sell *chicharrones* as appetizers, others offer them as full lunch or dinner meals, typically **served with cooked green bananas or yuca on the side.**

Where to try *chicharrones* in Costa Rica

***Chicharrones* are so popular in Costa Rica that some restaurants specialize in preparing them.** Look for these types of establishments, which are called “*chicharroneras*,” in touristy and non-touristy towns around the country. They usually provide the highest quality *chicharrones* that you can get in Costa Rica.

How to pronounce *chicharrones*

CHEE-CHAH-ROH-NAYS

- Chicharrones: 4 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables
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***Chifrijo* (chicharrones and beans mix)**

What is *chifrijo*? A typical Costa Rican snack.

Do you love *chicharrones* (more info on those above) and *frijoles* (beans)? If so, *chifrijo*—a snack that combines two of your favorite loves in one dish—should be on your list of must-try Costa Rican foods.

***Chifrijo*, which is usually sold in restaurants as an appetizer, is a chunky salsa that's typically eaten with nacho chips.** Besides *chicharrones* and beans, most preparations also include **cabbage, tomato or *pico de gallo*** (see below for more information about *pico de gallo*), and a slice or two of fresh avocado.

Where to try *chifrijo* in Costa Rica

*Chifrijo* is the signature dish of Costa Rica's capital city, San Jose. Though a handful of restaurants elsewhere in Costa Rica sell it, to have your pick of *chifrijo* preparations across restaurants (or to eat the very best in the country), order it during time spent in the capital.

How to pronounce *chifrijo*

CHEE-FREE-HOH

- Chifrijo: 3 syllables / light emphasis on the second syllable
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## ***Chilera* or *Chilero* (fermented vegetables)**

What is *chilera/chilero*? A typical Costa Rican condiment.

Visit one of Costa Rica's many *sodas* (traditional Costa Rican restaurants) and you'll likely see jars, resembling those in the photos above, atop the tables. The jars contain *chilera* (sometimes called *chilero*), a much-loved condiment featuring **fermented vegetables** (typically onions and carrots but sometimes cauliflower and cucumbers) that **locals use to add flavor to their food**. *Chilera/chilero* has a **vinegar base**, so expect a **tangy taste**, and it often features **peppers and/or spice**, which give the mix a **spicy kick**. Some people scoop helpings of vegetables out of the jar and others collect merely a spoonful of the liquid to pour over the top of their food. You can add *chilera/chilero* to any kind of food that you'd like to add flavor to, but **it most commonly tops rice dishes and meats**.

Where to try *chilera/chilero* in Costa Rica

*Chilera/chilero* is a **common sighting at traditional Costa Rican restaurants**. Look for it at your table, and if you don't see it, ask the waitstaff for it as it may be in the back.

How to pronounce *chilera/chilero*

CHEE-LAIR-AH and CHEE-LAIR-OH

- Chilera/Chilero: 3 syllables / light emphasis on the second syllable
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## ***Chorreadas* (sweet corn pancakes)**

What are *chorreadas*? A typical Costa Rican breakfast.

***Chorreadas* are Costa Rica's take on breakfast pancakes.** They're significantly denser than light and fluffy flapjacks, however, and **they taste a lot like corn**. They're also slightly sweet; no maple syrup required.

Where to try *chorreadas* in Costa Rica

Though *chorreadas* don't appear on most Costa Rican restaurant menus, *soda* restaurants that are open in the morning or that specialize in breakfast dishes tend to have them. **We usually spot *chorreadas* at authentic Costa Rican dining establishments with buffet bars**, so look for buffets if you long to try this traditional Costa Rican breakfast item.

How to pronounce *chorreadas*

CHOHR-RAY-AH-DAHS

- Chorreadas: 4 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables
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***Churros* (fried dough pastry) and *churros rellenos***

What are *churros*? A typical Costa Rican dessert.



*Churros* are to die for, figuratively speaking. **They're sweet, doughy, and delicious**, not to mention one of our guilty pleasures. Similar in taste to a variety of circus and fair foods in Canada and the US, such as funnel cakes, elephant ears, and beaver tails, these **fried doughnut sticks coated in granulated sugar** are a must-try treat. Some varieties known as *churros rellenos* (filled *churros*) are even richer: they come **stuffed with extra sweet fillings like *dulce de leche*** (similar to caramel).

### Where to try *churros* in Costa Rica

It's easy to find *churros* at popular Costa Rican gatherings, including *fiestas cívicas* (civic festivals), fairs, and family events. As a foreigner, you may find it tricky to get your hands on some, however. Most restaurants don't sell *churros*, but a few street vendors in town centers do.

### How to pronounce *churros*

CHUR-ROHS

- Churros: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables

### How to pronounce *churros rellenos*

CHUR-ROHS / RAY-YAY-NOHS

- Churros: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables
- Rellenos: 3 syllables / light emphasis on the second syllable

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## Coconut rice and beans

What are coconut rice and beans? A typical Costa Rican lunch or dinner.

Coconut rice and beans are similar to *gallo pinto* (more information about *gallo pinto* below) in that **the meal delivers a mix of white rice and either red or black beans**. However, the biggest difference between the two dishes is their flavor. If you guessed that **coconut rice and beans has a hint of coconut**, give yourself a pat on the back. **The coconut flavor comes from cooking the rice in coconut milk (black pepper is also added to give the meal a kick).**

Another significant difference between *gallo pinto* and coconut rice and beans (sometimes called “Caribbean rice and beans” or “Caribe rice and beans”) is the time of day they’re consumed. Though *gallo pinto* is served

for breakfast, **coconut rice and beans can be ordered as lunch or dinner meals.**

## Where to try coconut rice and beans in Costa Rica

Coconut rice and beans are one of several flavorful Costa Rican dishes that stem from the Caribbean. Though there are Caribbean-style restaurants spread out around that country that serve Caribbean meals (coconut rice and beans included), you'll find the dish nearly everywhere you go on the Caribbean side of the country, especially if you plan to visit a southern Caribbean destination between Cahuita and Manzanillo.

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## **Copos and churchills (shaved-ice sundaes)**

What are *copos* and churchills? Typical Costa Rican desserts.

If you have a sweet tooth, get ready to drool over Costa Rican *copos* and churchills. **Essentially the same dessert, albeit with one minor change**, *copos* and churchills are the treat you'll want in your hand on a hot, sticky, tropical day at a Costa Rican beach.

**Ice cream (usually vanilla in flavor, or sometimes chocolate, strawberry, or Neapolitan in flavor) and shaved ice form the base of both desserts.** The two ingredients are scooped into a cup and doused with **condensed milk, powdered milk, and syrup**. Usually red, Kola-brand syrup is used in Costa Rica (which resembles watered-down Grenadine), but we've seen *copos* and churchills prepared with syrups in a variety of colors and flavors, so the sky's the limit to what you can get.

**Churchills are *copos* that include a scoop of mixed fruit.** They're named after a gentleman who regularly ordered the customization and happened to resemble Winston Churchill.

Regardless of whether you order a *copo* or a churchill, you'll receive the dessert in a plastic cup with a plastic spoon and a plastic straw. **Some vendors also include a marshmallow for decoration and a wafer roll** to help you slurp the dessert's melted contents.

Where to try *copos* and churchills in Costa Rica

*Copos* are one of the most popular items that street vendors, park vendors, and beach vendors sell in Costa Rica. Most towns have at least one vendor, though you may need to ask a local where to find him or her on the day of your visit; they tend to move around.

**Churchills are a Puntarenas specialty. The best place to try one of these twists on traditional *copos* is along the waterfront boardwalk known as the *Paseo de los Turistas*, near the tip of the central Pacific port city of Puntarenas.** Street vendors and restaurants that line the promenade create the treat. You'll also find a row of roadside vendors along [Highway 23](#) between the turnoff to Puntarenas ([Highway 17](#)) and the Caldera port (at [Highway 27](#)). For more information about Costa Rica's highways, don't miss our related blog post: [Costa Rica Highway Conditions By Route](#).

How to pronounce *copos*

COH-POHS

- Copos: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables

“Churchill” is an English word pronounced like Winston Churchill.

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***Empanadas* (fried turnovers)**

What are *empanadas*? A typical Costa Rican lunch, dinner, snack, or dessert.

*Empanadas* are **half-moon-shaped corn patties**. They're either **baked or fried** and are usually **stuffed** with cheese, meat, vegetables, or beans if served as a savory snack. If served as a dessert, they contain sweet and syrupy fruit blends.

Though *empanadas* are typically small in size and can be ordered as an appetizer, **lunch or dinner orders usually provide more than one *empanada* and a handful of side dishes**.

Where to try empanadas in Costa Rica

***Empanadas* are hit and miss at Costa Rican restaurants around the country.** Several establishments list the food item on their menu and several others do not. Ask to review a restaurant's menu prior to entering the establishment if your purpose for dining out is to try *empanadas*.

How to pronounce *empanadas*

EHM-PAH-NAH-DAHS

- Empanadas: 4 syllables / equal emphasis on all syllables
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***Ensalada* (salad), including *ensalada verde*, *ensalada Rusa*, *ensalada repollo*, and *ensalada de pasta***

What is *ensalada*? A typical Costa Rican side dish.

This suggestion may seem like it's not worth trying since you're probably used to eating *ensalada verde* (literally "green salad," better known as "garden salad") at home. But Costa Rica serves several other kinds of salad as side dishes that you may wish to try, like bright-purple ***ensalada Rusa***, a potato, beet, and hard-boiled egg blend, and ***ensalada repollo***, a vinegar-based cabbage salad. Types of *ensalada de pasta* (pasta salad) are available too. They're usually made with small **shell pasta and tuna**.

Where to try *ensalada verde*, *ensalada Rusa*, *ensalada repollo*, and *ensalada de pasta* in Costa Rica

Many authentic **soda restaurants, especially sodas that have buffet bars, serve *ensaladas***. Salad selection varies from day to day and across establishments.

### How to pronounce *ensalada verde*

EHN-SAH-LAH-DAH / BAIR-DAY

- Ensalada: 4 syllables / equal emphasis on all syllables
- Verde: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables

### How to pronounce *ensalada Rusa*

EHN-SAH-LAH-DAH / ROO-SAH

- Ensalada: 4 syllables / equal emphasis on all syllables
- Rusa: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables

### How to pronounce *ensalada repollo*

EHN-SAH-LAH-DAH / RAY-POY-YOH

- Ensalada: 4 syllables / equal emphasis on all syllables
- Repollo: 3 syllables / light emphasis on the second syllable

### How to pronounce *ensalada de pasta*



EHN-SAH-LAH-DAH / DAY / PAH-STAH

- Ensalada: 4 syllables / equal emphasis on all syllables
  - De: 1 syllable
  - Pasta: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables
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## ***Enyucado* (fried and stuffed yuca roll)**

What is *enyucado*? A typical Costa Rican snack.

Not unlike *empanadas* (more information on *empanadas* above) *enyucados* are **small, stuffed finger foods that are typically baked or fried**. They differ from *empanadas* in shape and fillings, however. *Enyucados* look like rolls, and are usually **stuffed** with ground beef (they can also be stuffed with cheese, beans, vegetables, or tuna). **The primary ingredient in their preparation is yuca**, which gives *enyucados* they're name and starchy composition.

**Note that *enyucados* in Costa Rica are significantly different than *enyucados* prepared elsewhere in the world, which resemble cake.**

Where to try *enyucados* in Costa Rica

***Enyucados* are tough to find in Costa Rica.** Your best chance of trying one is at a typical *soda* restaurant, though the majority of *sodas* in Costa Rica don't prepare them. To save you wasted time wandering around

from restaurant to restaurant, ask a local in the city you plan to visit whether he or she knows of a place in town that sells the dish.

How to pronounce *enyucado*

EHN-YOO-CAH-DOH

- Enyucado: 4 syllables / equal emphasis on all syllables
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## ***Flan de coco* (coconut flan)**

What is *flan de coco*? A typical Costa Rican dessert.

***Flan de coco* is one of the most popular desserts consumed by locals in Costa Rica.** If you've ever tried flan in your home country, you know to expect a smooth, gelatinous dessert. If you order *flan de coco* in Costa Rica, you'll receive the same: a slice of **smooth, gelatinous, coconut-flavored flan, topped with a layer of sweet caramelized sugar.**

## Where to try *flan de coco* in Costa Rica

As a favorite among Ticos, you'll have great luck finding *flan de coco* at many restaurants in Costa Rica, including *soda* restaurants and touristy establishments. Some restaurant menus list the item simply as "flan." Though coconut is the most common flavor of flan served in Costa Rica, be sure to have the restaurant confirm that it's *flan de coco* you'll receive, not flan of a different type.

## How to pronounce *flan*

FLAHN

- Flan: 2 syllables

Want to make Costa Rican flan de coco yourself? Check out our instructions and photos in the related blog post:

*[How To Make Flan De Coco: A Popular Costa Rican Dessert](#)*

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## ***Fruita*** (fruit)

What is *fruta*? A refreshing natural snack.

***Fruta*** is a staple breakfast item, and a refreshing snack commonly served during adventure tours. Most often, a variety of tropical fruits is served, including **bananas, pineapple, watermelon, and papaya.**

Where to try *fruta* in Costa Rica

Eating fruit in Costa Rica is easy. Nearly every hotel serves it for breakfast, most restaurants have it on hand to dish out over lunch (if desired), several adventure tour operators supply tour participants with it during the day, and it is readily available for purchase at every grocery store in the nation.

How to pronounce *fruta*

FROO-TAH

- Fruta: 2 syllables

***Gallo pinto* (rice and beans mix)**



What is *gallo pinto*? A typical Costa Rican breakfast.

Arguably the most Costa Rican of all things you can eat in Costa Rica is *gallo pinto*. This **staple breakfast dish** is eaten by Ticos (Costa Ricans) daily. You'll eat it daily too (and perhaps get tired of doing so) if you plan to spend a significant amount of time in the country. If it helps you any, *gallo pinto* is my favorite Costa Rican food, and I'm not even a big fan of beans.

*Gallo pinto* is built with two main foods: **white rice and black beans** (less frequently, red beans are used). It's a mix of the two foods, together with **flavorful additions like salt and Costa Rica's signature sauce, *Salsa Lizano***. The end product is a dry dish full of soft (and somewhat bland) rice and beans, supplemented by *Lizano's* tangy (but not spicy) zip. The dish gets its name (which translates to "speckled rooster") from the beans speckled throughout the dish.

**Some servings of *gallo pinto* also include potent cilantro—a green, parsley-looking herb—which is an acquired taste.** Sweet red pepper and onion may also be included.

Where to try *gallo pinto* in Costa Rica

Perhaps the easier question to answer here is where *can't* you try *gallo pinto* in Costa Rica? To which we would answer, "nowhere!" **Every restaurant in Costa Rica that serves Costa Rican cuisine and is open for breakfast has a plate full of *gallo pinto* with your name on it.**

## How to pronounce *gallo pinto*

GUY-YOH / PEEN-TOH

- Gallo: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables
- Pinto: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables

Want to make Costa Rican gallo pinto yourself? Check out our instructions and photos in the related blog post:

*[How To Make Gallo Pinto: A Popular Costa Rican Breakfast](#)*

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## ***Helado*** (ice cream)

What is *helado*? A typical Costa Rican treat.

Like *copos* and churchills (see above for more information about both), ice cream is a refreshing treat **best enjoyed on a hot day**. Here's a list of some of the (many) flavors of ice cream you can purchase in Costa Rica: vanilla, chocolate, strawberry, caramel, coconut, churchill, chocolate mint, bubblegum, *dulce de leche*, rum raisin, pistachio, chocolate chips, coffee, banana, cotton candy, cookies and cream, brownie, chocolate almond, mango, and *rompope* (eggnog). **You can also buy frozen yogurt, sorbet, and even gelato in Costa Rica.**

Where to try *helado* in Costa Rica

***Helado* can be purchased from most restaurants and *heladerias* (ice cream parlors) in Costa Rica.** The most recognizable *heladeria*, which you can find all over Costa Rica, is **POPS**. It carries most of the flavors of ice cream listed above.

How to pronounce *helado*

AYE-LAH-DOH

- Helado: 3 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables
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## ***Olla de carne* (beef soup / stew)**

What is *olla de carne*? A typical Costa Rican lunch or dinner.



*Olla de carne*, which is one of Ricky's longtime favorite Costa Rican meals, is a **soup/stew comprised of a mild, watery broth, bone-in meat, and vegetables**. It's also the chunkiest soup/stew I've ever laid my eyes on. **The pieces of meat and vegetables you'll get in the bowl are gigantic**, including a whopping chunk of beef, half a corn cob, and half a potato. Smaller pieces of other vegetables (like carrots) are thrown in as well, and **a bowl of white rice, which most Ticos toss into the soup/stew, is generally served on the side**.

Where to try *olla de carne* in Costa Rica

*Olla de carne* is a fairly common lunch or dinner menu item **available to order at traditional soda restaurants**. If you plan to eat at fancier, more touristy establishments in Costa Rica, stick to **steakhouses**. These types of restaurants usually serve meat dishes inspired by international cuisines as well as meat-based Costa Rican favorites, like *olla de carne*.

How to pronounce *olla de carne*

OH-YAH / DAY / CAHR-NAY

- Olla: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables
  - De: 1 syllable
  - Carne: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables
-

## ***Pan* (bread), including *pan dulce*, *pan bon*, *pan casero*, and *budin* (bread pudding)**

What is *pan*? A typical Costa Rican snack or dessert.

Costa Ricans love to bake and eat sweet bread. Hence, the popularity of *pan dulce* (literally, “sweet bread”) and other bread creations that are somewhat sweet-tasting, including *pan bon*, *pan casero*, and *budin*.

Let’s start with a disclaimer. Like most Costa Rican desserts that are full of processed sugar, the delicacies of *pan dulce*, *pan casero*, and *pan bon* aren’t good for you. They’re baked goods prepared with loads of white sugar, white flour, and butter. But they taste soooooo good.

Though similar, there are a few differences between each type of sweet bread. *Pan dulce* is **a plain sweet bread that sometimes has fruit strewn throughout**. The photo above depicts a sweet bread my Costa

Rican mother-in-law made using cooked *chiverre*, a pumpkin-like fruit. *Pan casero* is usually **baked as small discs** and typically doesn't have fruit inside. *Pan bon* is **a darker sweet bread that's usually baked as a loaf and often displays a braid or other pretty design on top**. Similar to a fruitcake, *pan bon* is **sweetened with candied fruit and sometimes contains nuts**. *Budin* is a **soft and light cake** typically served as a dessert. It's Central America's take on traditional English bread pudding.

Where to try *pan dulce*, *pan bon*, *pan casero*, and *budin* in Costa Rica

Most Costa Rican **bakeries and cafes in Costa Rica sell their take on *pan dulce* and *pan casero***. To try *pan bon*, you'll need to **head to the Caribbean side of the country**. Look for **roadside vendors** as you approach the port city of Limon. If you don't come across any, you may have good luck finding one at destinations in the southern Caribbean between Cahuita and Manzanillo. Though *budin* is prepared year-round and can often be purchased from local *panaderias* (bakeries), **it's most often enjoyed around the holidays**, including Christmas and Semana Santa (Easter). Some hotels will serve it as part of their **breakfast buffets during holiday periods**.

How to pronounce *pan dulce*

PAHN / DOOL-SAY

- Pan: 1 syllable
- Dulce: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables

How to pronounce *pan bon*

PAHN / BOHN

- Pan: 1 syllable
- Bon: 1 syllable

How to pronounce *pan casero*

PAHN / CAH-SAIR-OH

- Pan: 1 syllable
- Casero: 3 syllables / light emphasis on the second syllable

How to pronounce *budin*

BOO-DEEN

- Budin: 2 syllables

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***Patis* (Jamaican-style turnovers)**

What are *costillas*, *cocadas*, and *cajetas de coco*? Typical Costa Rican snacks.

Though the word “*costillas*” doesn’t directly translate to “pastries” (instead, the word translates to “ribs”), it’s a name Costa Ricans use to refer to **jelly-filled pastry sticks**. These **crunchy, flaky pastries** usually come in guava or pineapple flavor and have **granulated sugar sprinkled on top**. They’re my favorite sweet snack to pack for a hike or for a visit to a local swimming hole.

Other sugary treats worth trying in Costa Rica are *cocadas* (coconut tarts) and *cajetas de coco* (coconut chewy bars).

Where to try *costillas*, *cocadas*, and *cajetas de coco* in Costa Rica

Bags of *costillas* can be purchased from most **grocery stores and pulperias (corner stores)** in Costa Rica. They usually come 8-10 in a package.

Fresh-baked *costillas* and other pastries can be purchased from **bakeries** in Costa Rica. The bakery chain **Musmanni** has several stores in Costa Rica and rarely disappoints with its creations.

You're most likely to find *cocadas* at food stands in the **Caribbean**. *Cajetas de coco* (and *cajetas* of other flavors) are sold at **food stands** and ***pulperias* (corner stores)** all over Costa Rica.

### How to pronounce *costillas*

COHS-TEE-YAHS

- Costillas: 3 syllables / light emphasis on the second syllable

### How to pronounce *cocadas*

COH-CAH-DAHS

- Cocadas: 3 syllables / light emphasis on the second syllable

### How to pronounce *cajetas de coco*

CAH-HAY-TAHS / DAY / COH-COH

- Cajetas: 3 syllables / light emphasis on the second syllable
  - De: 1 syllable
  - Coco: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables
-

## ***Tamales* (tamals), including regular *tamales*, *tamal de maicena*, and *tamal asado***

What are *tamales*? A typical Costa Rican lunch, dinner, or snack.

Many people don't know that there are many kinds of *tamales* you can try in Costa Rica. The most popular are regular, individual *tamales*, which are most commonly prepared and enjoyed during **holiday celebrations**.

These *tamales* are **soft masa patties that are traditionally cooked in a banana leaf and stuffed with cheese, meat, vegetables, or beans**.

Other kinds of tamales, which can be **purchased year-round** in Costa Rica, include *tamal de maicena* and *tamal asado*. These preparations **resemble quiche**. They're usually served in bars or slices.

Where to try regular *tamales*, *tamal de maicena*, and *tamal asado* in Costa Rica

**Soda restaurants are your best bet for finding any type of Costa Rican *tamales*.** Advertisements for regular *tamales* appear on restaurant signs and poster boards around **Christmas and Easter**. Given the amount of work that goes into preparing these kinds of *tamales*, very few establishments sell them on the regular throughout the year.

*Tamal de maicena* and *tamal asado* aren't offered by most restaurants in Costa Rica but they are prepared throughout the year. We usually find these types of *tamales* at **authentic Costa Rican dining establishments that have buffet bars**.

How to pronounce *tamales*

TAH-MAH-LAYS

- Tamales: 3 syllables / equal emphasis on all syllables

How to pronounce *tamal de maicena*

TAH-MAHL / DAY / MY-EE-SAY-NAH

- Tamal: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables
- De: 1 syllable
- Maicena: 4 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables



## How to pronounce *tamal asado*

TAH-MAHL / AH-SAH-DOH

- Tamal: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables
  - Asado: 3 syllables / light emphasis on the second syllable
- 

## ***Torta Chilena* (Chilean cake)**

What is *torta Chilena*? A typical Costa Rican dessert.

If you want to try a decadent dessert, go for a slice of *torta Chilena*. This heavenly dessert is comprised of layers of baked pie pastry and sweet dulce de leche (caramel). It's sticky, sweet, and oh-so delicious.

Where to try *torta Chilena* in Costa Rica

*Torta Chilena* is a specialty dessert and most *sodas* (traditional Costa Rican restaurants) don't serve it, so you'll need to put in some effort to find it. Specialty cafes sometimes serve it, as do some bakeries, like the popular chain *Musmanni*, which has several installments countrywide.

## How to pronounce *torta Chilena*

TOR-TAH / CHEE-LAY-NAH

- Torta: 2 syllables
  - Chilena: 3 syllables / light emphasis on the second syllable
- 

## ***Tres leches* (three-milk cake)**

What is *tres leches*? A typical Costa Rican dessert.

Are you a fan of creamy desserts? If so, you've got to try *tres leches* in Costa Rica. It's a **sweet, wet, spongy cake drenched in a three-milk trio of regular milk, evaporated milk, and condensed milk**. Whipped cream and a bit of cinnamon top off the rich but light dessert.

Where to try *tres leches* in Costa Rica

You're in luck! *Tres leches* is a local favorite and **the most common cake sold in Costa Rica. Most restaurants that offer desserts sell it**. Nine times out of ten, the cake will be **vanilla flavored**, but we've also

stumbled upon a few places in Costa Rica that make *tres leches* with chocolate cake. Though decadent, go for the vanilla cake if you can. It's the most authentic version of the dessert, and it allows the flavorful three-milk combo to stand out.

## How to pronounce *tres leches*

### TRAYS / LAY-CHAYS

- Tres: 1 syllable
- Leches: 2 syllables / equal emphasis on both syllables

Want to make Costa Rican tres leches cake yourself? Check out our instructions and photos in the related blog post:

*How To Make Tres Leches Cake: A Popular Costa Rican Dessert*

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***Tortillas, including *tortillas de harina*, *tortillas de maiz*, and *tortillas rellenas****

What are *tortillas*? A typical Costa Rican snack or side dish.

If you plan to eat at several authentic restaurants in Costa Rica, *tortillas* will sneak up on you time and time again. They're **a side dish that's added to all kinds of meals, including breakfast, lunch, and dinner orders**. If it's white in color, it's likely a *tortilla de harina*, a **soft, wheat flour *tortilla***. If it's yellow in color, it's more likely a *tortilla de maiz*, a **soft, corn flour *tortilla***.

*Tortillas* can be eaten on their own or with other items. When they're used to carry other items like meat or vegetables, similar to how flour and corn "wraps" are used in Canada and the US, they're called "**gallos**." *Tortillas* are best consumed **slightly warm and with a bit of butter**. Some rich varieties known as *tortillas rellenas* (filled *tortillas*) are **stuffed with cheese**.

Where to try *tortillas* in Costa Rica

**Nearly every restaurant in Costa Rica is stocked with *tortillas***. The very best **prepare their own *tortillas* in-house**. Most will include a *tortilla* on your plate, even if you didn't ask for it. **Grocery stores** around the country sell *tortillas* in the bread aisle.

How to pronounce *tortillas de harina*

TOHR-TEE-YAHS / DAY / AHR-EE-NAH

- Tortillas: 3 syllables / light emphasis on the second syllable
- De: 1 syllable
- Harina: 3 syllables / light emphasis on the second syllable

How to pronounce *tortillas de maiz*

TOHR-TEE-YAHS / DAY / MY-EEZ

- Tortillas: 3 syllables / light emphasis on the second syllable
- De: 1 syllable
- Maiz: 2 syllables / light emphasis on the second syllable

How to pronounce *tortillas rellenas*

TOHR-TEE-YAHS / RAY-YAY-NAHS

- Tortillas: 3 syllables / light emphasis on the second syllable
- Rellenas: 3 syllables / light emphasis on the second syllable

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***Vigoron (chicharrones, cabbage, and yuca mix)***

What is a *vigoron*? A typical Costa Rican lunch, dinner, or snack.

Want to see *chicharrones* (more info on those above), *pico de gallo* (more info on that also above), and the vegetables cabbage and *yuca* (cassava) combined in one dish? Your wish is our command! Try a *vigoron*. This **street meat compilation** is one of the best Costa Rica has to offer.

Where to try *vigorones* in Costa Rica

***Vigorones* are a Puntarenas specialty.** The best place to try them are along the waterfront boardwalk known as the *Paseo de los Turistas*, near the tip of the central Pacific port city of Puntarenas. **Street vendors and restaurants** that line the promenade sell the snack, which is filling enough to be a light lunch or dinner.

How to pronounce *vigoron*

BEE-GOHR-OHN

- Vigoron: 3 syllables / light emphasis on the third syllable

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