



THE MAJESTIC LODGE

Getting Married in Costa Rica

A guide for US citizens

What you actually need, what trips Americans up, and how long the paperwork really takes. Every source cited on the last page so you can check it yourself.

Not legal advice. Requirements change — confirm with a Costa Rican attorney.

The short version

Marrying in Costa Rica is more straightforward than most couples expect. The civil ceremony is performed by a Costa Rican attorney or notary, there is no residency requirement, and the marriage is recognised in the United States.

- No residency requirement and no waiting period. A normal tourist entry stamp is enough.
- A Costa Rican attorney or notary (notario publico) performs the ceremony. US Embassy and consular staff cannot marry you.
- Two witnesses are required. They attest to your legal capacity to marry.
- Your marriage is valid in the US. A marriage legally performed abroad is generally recognised, and you need not report it to the Embassy.
- Same-sex marriage has been legal since 26 May 2020 — Costa Rica was the first country in Central America to legalise it. The process is identical.

WHAT TO BRING

- ☐ Passports, valid at least six months. A passport is the only accepted ID — a driver's licence will not do.
- ☐ Certified, apostilled birth certificates.
- ☐ If either of you was previously married: an apostilled divorce decree, or the former spouse's death certificate.
- ☐ Anything not in Spanish needs official translation, normally arranged by your notary.

Two things that trip Americans up

1. THERE IS NO US 'CERTIFICATE OF SINGLE STATUS'

Many countries issue a government document proving you are free to marry. The United States does not, and this causes more confusion than anything else in the process.

Instead you sign a *declaracion jurada de solteria* — a sworn affidavit, made under penalty of perjury, that you are legally free to marry. Your Costa Rican notary normally drafts it and you sign on the day, alongside your two witnesses.

Some notaries prefer it notarised in advance, in which case the US Embassy in San Jose provides notarial services for a fee. Ask your attorney which they want before you travel.

2. THE 300-DAY RULE

Almost no wedding site mentions this. Under Costa Rican law a woman who is divorced or widowed must wait 300 days from the date of the divorce decree or the death certificate before she can remarry. It can be waived with medical proof that she is not pregnant. If a divorce was finalised within the last ten months, raise it with your attorney early — there is a route through it, but not one to discover the week of the wedding.

APOSTILLES — START THESE EARLY

Costa Rica belongs to the Hague Apostille Convention, so US documents need an apostille rather than embassy legalisation.

- State-issued documents — birth certificates, divorce decrees — are apostilled by the Secretary of State of the issuing state.
- Federal documents are apostilled by the US Department of State in Washington.
- Use certified copies from the state registrar, not photocopies.
- Turnaround runs from days to many weeks depending on the state. Begin at least three months out.

After the wedding

You are married on the day. The paperwork lands months later, and it is worth understanding the gap.

ON THE DAY

The notary drafts and files the marriage act. You and your two witnesses sign.

~2-3 MONTHS

Costa Rica's Registro Civil, part of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, records the marriage.

AFTER RECORDING

The certificate is apostilled by Costa Rica's Ministry of Foreign Affairs so it can be used in the US.

IF YOU NEED ENGLISH

Have it officially translated — your attorney usually arranges this.

Plan any name change, spousal visa or insurance application around the certificate arriving, not around the wedding date.

Or skip all of it

A great many couples do the legal paperwork at home — a courthouse signing before or after the trip — and hold a symbolic ceremony in Costa Rica. Same day, same photographs, same guests, and none of the apostilles, affidavits or waiting periods above.

No guest will know the difference. If the admin above feels heavy, this is the route most people take, and there is nothing lesser about it.

Sources

Everything in this guide was checked against the following. Requirements change, so verify the current position before you book flights.

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cr.usembassy.gov/services/

US Citizen Services — marrying abroad and US recognition

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Expat.com — Getting married in Costa Rica: formalities for expats

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costaricalaw.com/costa-rica-legal-topics/immigration-and-residency/how-to-get-an-apostille-in-the-united-states/

Human Rights Watch — Costa Rica legalises same-sex marriage (26 May 2020)

hrw.org/news/2020/05/26/costa-rica-first-central-america-legalize-same-sex-marriage

Wikipedia — Same-sex marriage in Costa Rica

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex_marriage_in_Costa_Rica

Compiled by The Majestic Lodge, La Fortuna. We are a wedding venue, not a law firm, and this is not legal advice. Confirm the current requirements with a Costa Rican attorney.

WHERE TO MARRY

The Majestic Lodge

A private 10-bedroom wedding venue in La Fortuna, Costa Rica, below Arenal Volcano. Up to 50 guests, with 33 of your party sleeping on site. One wedding at a time.

GUESTS	up to 50
SLEEPS ON SITE	33 across 10 en-suite bedrooms
CEREMONY	covered deck — rain does not stop it
ALSO AVAILABLE	catering, airport transfers, vehicles, massages

majesticcostarica.com