

Neighborhoods of the Central Valley

by Hernán Carazo



Over half of Costa Rica's population of just over 4 million people lives in the Central Valley also called the Central Plateau or Meseta Central in Spanish. This valley lies at an altitude between 3000 and 4000 feet above sea level and offers a spring like climate year-round. It is surrounded by mountains and is Costa Rica's primary agricultural region as the rich volcanic soil makes it ideal for growing almost anything including what is arguably the best coffee in the world. The capital city of San Jose is located here as well.

It includes the cities of Alajuela and Heredia as well as Santa Ana and Escazu which are extremely popular areas for new arrivals as well as seasoned residents. We will take a quick look at each of these neighborhoods and go into more details on each in our upcoming editions. If you miss any of our issues, please keep in mind that you can see the current issue as well as past issues and many helpful articles on our comprehensive website at www.thecostaricaguide.com.

SABANA - ROHRMOSER - PAVAS

La Sabana Park is a large city park with lakes, trails, museums, sports fields, Stadium, Olympic pool and many more attractions open to the general public

which is located just on the outskirts of the center of the city and has nice upscale neighborhoods to the north, south and west named after it. Just west and north of those is Rohrmoser which is an excellent neighborhood made up of mostly homes with some businesses along the main tree lined road of Rohrmoser Boulevard. Many embassy homes are located in this area as well as some very nice neighborhood parks. Most residents here are middle to upper class with a mixture of Costa Ricans and foreign nationals. There is excellent access to all major highways and to all types of services and amenities. Shopping in the area includes Plaza Mayor Mall, an English language bookstore and movie theaters. Pavas is just west and south of La Sabana and is highly commercial with homes there being mostly middle class. The main road is Pavas Boulevard and the US embassy is located on it as well as banks, restaurants, shops, cafes, bakeries, and just about any type of store you might need.

ESCAZU - BELLO HORIZONTE TREJOS MONTEALEGRE

This is an extremely popular neighborhood with foreign residents and in fact as you go down the main road into Escazu and see the variety of stores and

restaurants such as Tony Roma's, TGIF, McDonalds, KFC, Blockbuster, Rooms to Go, and such, you have to blink twice to make sure you're not back in the USA. Here you can find palatial estates, hi-rise penthouses, luxury accommodations such as Villas del Rio, ambassador's homes and mixed right in you will also find simple local homes. Many of the finest homes in this area are owned by wealthy Costa Ricans who enjoy the beauty of the area and the convenience of having everything from great restaurants, top notch shopping malls, state of the art medical facilities, office buildings and great nightlife and entertainment nearby. This neighborhood is also home to the exclusive Costa Rica Country Club which offers golf and tennis for its members. Many private, bilingual schools are also located here or nearby. Known as the Beverly Hills of Costa Rica, this area's popularity is going strong. The upscale neighborhoods of Trejos Montealegre and Bello Horizonte are both located here as well. Check this area out.

SANTA ANA - CIUDAD COLON

Just West of Escazu is Santa Ana and Ciudad Colon which is further west still. This area has seen the tremendous growth in this direction as the city extends itself outward. A big push has

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come from the beautiful highway that begins at La Sabana and currently ends at Ciudad Colon and which will continue on toward the Central Pacific beaches when the Ciudad Colon-Caldera highway project is completed in 2-3 years. This will put the ocean less than a half hour away!! Santa Ana is a great place to live as it offers a warm, dry climate year round and is near the CIMA Hospital and Medical Tower (a state of the art facility), Multiplaza - Costa Rica's largest mall, Price Smart (yep, just like back in the states), the Intercontinental Hotel, Marriott Courtyard and the Comfort Hotel, the ultra modern Plaza Roble and Forum office complexes and so much more. Here again you will find a good mixture of Costa Ricans and foreigners enjoying life to the fullest in one of Costa Rica's favorite neighborhoods. "Downtown" Santa Ana; however, retains its local small town flavor and is

very much like the majority of small towns in Costa Rica with a church opposite a park and soccer field at the center of town. Santa Ana also has an interesting variety of restaurants including a great tex-mex restaurant downtown and some small boutique hotels nearby including Hotel Alta which we highly approve and which also has an excellent restaurant. Definitely a boom area as the city grows westwardly.

**CIUDAD CARIARI
SAN ANTONIO DE BELEN**

Known more commonly as Cariari, and located approximately 5 miles north of San Jose, this neighborhood has as its centerpiece, the Cariari Country Club with its beautiful golf course. Located just off the highway from Juan Santamaria International Airport, you can find many top hotels here including Melia Cariari, Herradura, and the

Residencias de Golf as well as good restaurants and the American International School. This is a great high-end neighborhood. Just across the highway is Real Cariari - a major shopping mall with a great kids carousel inside. Just to the west of Cariari is San Antonio de Belen. More commonly known as Belen, this generally laid back town has experienced rapid growth since INTEL's huge microprocessor plant opened. You can also find a variety of housing available here in all price ranges as well as the luxurious San Jose Marriott Hotel.

**SAN PEDRO - LOS YOSÉS
BARRIO DENT - CURRIDABAT**

These neighborhoods, located to the east of downtown San Jose, are well established and have a mix of both new and older high quality homes and businesses, especially Los Yoses. Curridabat

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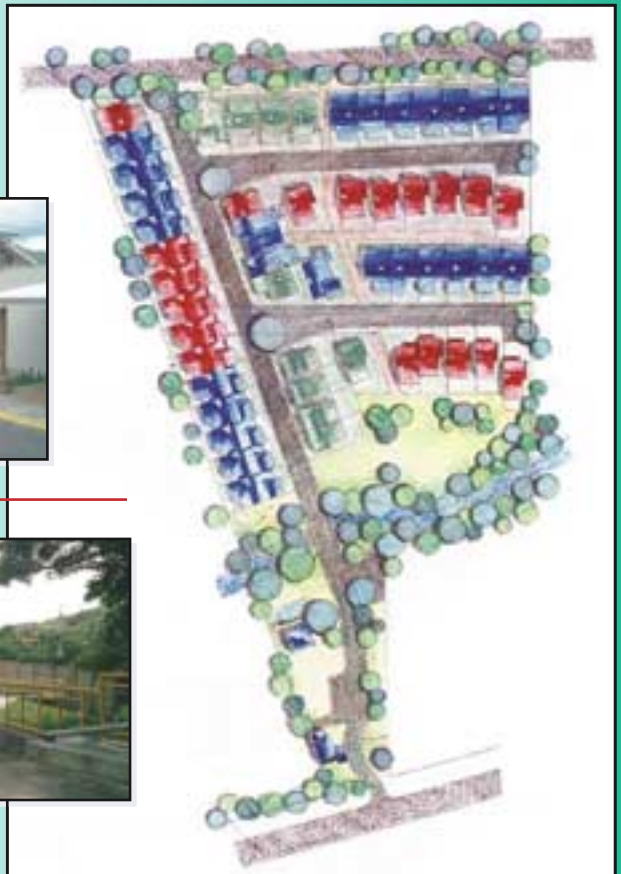
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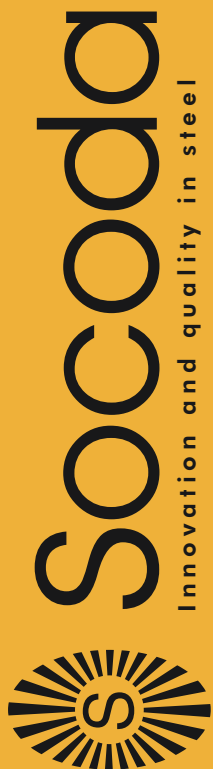
is the furthest east and is an upscale area composed primarily of residences and many beautiful homes can be found here as well as Plaza del Sol which is Costa Rica's first real mall. Lots of shopping available in these neighborhoods, as you will find Mall San Pedro - housing a major mall, an office tower and a movie theater complex. Further east is the University of Costa Rica campus and many surrounding restaurants and all kinds of entertainment venues, all catering to the university crowd and the local residents. Also the newer American mall and many shops of all types line the main road heading east as well as many language schools which call this area home. This is a great area to live in if you like the convenience of having everything nearby and don't mind the more crowded environment.

HEREDIA - ALAJUELA

These towns are on the outskirts of San Jose and offer all the green areas and views Costa Rica is famous for with all the local flavor and a variety of housing options from inexpensive simple homes to multi-million dollar mansions. Definitely something for everyone here. Heredia is nice and cool and as you go higher up into the mountains in areas such as El Castillo, home to the beautiful La Condesa Hotel and several upscale residential developments, San Rafael and Barva. This area is located 25-30 minutes from San Jose and offers a beautiful rural environment with plenty of homes and lots available.

Alajuela is the second largest city in Costa Rica. Located about 30 minutes out of San Jose and home to Costa Rica's major airport. As you pass the airport

and head east past downtown Alajuela you will very quickly encounter the real feel of Costa Rica with lots of coffee farms, an oxcart or two, horses and lots and lots of green areas and spectacular views. Again plenty of homes and lots available for every budget and taste. As in most of Costa Rica, outside of gated developments and a few neighborhoods, you will find housing varies greatly with expensive homes often built near more modest residences but nobody seems to mind.



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