

*The News Here and Now!*

## ▲ BUSINESS & ECONOMY

### **Costa Rica Latin America's No. 1 tourist target**

(EKA) — Costa Rica has been named the most attractive Latin American tourist destination for infrastructure, policies and customer service, according to the first Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index issued by the World Economic Forum.

“Our study is not a ‘beauty contest’ or a statement about the attractiveness of a country,” said Jennifer Blanke, senior consultant for the WEF’s Global Competitiveness Network. “On the contrary, we aim to measure the factors that make it attractive to develop the travel and tourism industry of individual countries.”

The Swiss-based group’s cross-country analysis of the drivers of competitiveness in travel and tourism provides useful comparative information for making business decisions and added value to governments interested building travel and tourism. Published March 1, the study included 124 countries around the world. It is closely related to other rankings conducted by the organization, such as the more general Global Competitiveness Index.

In travel and tourism, Costa Rica ranked 41 out of 124 worldwide, with a score of 4.60. But that ranking placed it first in Latin America and fourth in the entire Western Hemisphere. The United States ranked fifth, at a score of 5.30. Canada ranked seventh, at 5.31. Barbados stood at No. 29, at 4.86.

The second best-ranked Central American nation was Panama (No. 55, at 4.28 points), followed by Guatemala (No. 69 place, at 4.00) and El Salvador (No. 77, at 3.90). Honduras was No. 87 and Nicaragua was 89. Belize was not included in the sample.

In the larger region, Costa Rica was trailed by Chile (No. 45, at 4.58 points), Mexico (No. 49, at 4.38 points), and the Dominican Republic (No. 50, 4.35 points).

Leading the index globally were Switzerland (5.66), Austria (5.54), Germany (5.48) and Iceland (5.45). These countries, Blanke said, “demonstrate the importance of supportive business and regulatory frameworks, coupled with world-class transport and tourism infrastructure and a focus on nurturing human and natural resources, for fostering an environment that is attractive for developing the travel and tourism sector.”

In the Index’s “Highlights,” Costa Rica was noted for its strength in the area of natural resources, ranking No. 12 worldwide on the percentage of nationally protected territory.

Regarding its policy environment, the index cited Costa Rica as “very conducive to the development of the sector (ranked 17th), with open bilateral Air Service Agreements, low visa requirements and an environment that welcomes foreign investment.”

Safety and security “remain a concern,” however, the report said, ranking the country in 67th place.

And while tourism infrastructure is quite well developed (36th place), the report said ground transport infrastructure remains “highly underdeveloped (93rd), particularly roads and ports, making travel in the country somewhat difficult.”

### **Costa Rica in numbers**

The report provided the following data:

—Costa Rica receives 1,697,000 visitors per year (followed by Guatemala, with 1,316,000, and El Salvador, with 1,154,000).

—Costa Rica's tourist industry generates \$1.375 billion (7.1 percent of GDP).

—The country's tourist economy (which includes direct and indirect jobs generated by this industry) comes to \$3.227 billion.

—The tourist industry specifically creates 120,000 jobs, or 7.3 percent of the country's total employment.

—The tourist economy more generally accounts for 268,000 jobs, or 16.4 of the country's total.

Complete index information is available at

<http://www.weforum.org/en/media/Latest%20Press%20Releases/Tourismpressrelease>