OFF THE HOOK

Tackling Costa Rica's famous fishing grounds

By Lauren Beck

Costa Rica is a wonderland. From its diverse Caribbean and Pacific waters to its mountains, beaches, cloud forests, rainforests, and tropical dry forests, it's an explorer's utopia.

More than two million tourists flock to Costa Rica annually, drawn to its breathtaking natural beauty and unparalleled biodiversity. It's also one of the world's top fishing spots, attracting anglers looking to catch the big one. From chasing billfish offshore to casting for roosterfish inshore or searching for tarpon on the Caribbean coast, Costa Rica's pristine, calm waters and variety of marine life make it a true paradise for fishermen.

Fishing is possible year-round in Costa Rica, with the Pacific side generally regarded as having the best fishing grounds. Although peak seasons vary for different fish species, options are plentiful regardless of when you visit for offshore, inshore, and freshwater (Lake Arenal is considered the best spot) fishing. Marlin, dorado, tuna, wahoo, sailfish, snapper, snook, and roosterfish are commonly found along the Pacific coast.

If you're not taking your sportfisher through the Panama Canal, you can easily arrange fishing charters from half-day to multiple-day excursions through local marinas or resorts. Most flights from the U.S. are just a few hours, making Costa Rica a convenient destination.

Pay attention to Costa Rica's regulations to conserve its marine resources and promote sustainable fishing. Sustainability is a priority, and catch-and-release policies for billfish and other vulnerable species are in place. Billfish, including various marlin and sailfish species, are catch and release in the water. For conservation purposes, the Instituto Costarricense de Pesca y Acuicultura allows only five fish per fishing trip to be landed.

Verify the permits and licenses required for your trip.



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Each person must have their own fishing license, which costs $15 for one to eight days, $30 for 30 days, and $50 for an annual license. While charter captains often handle these arrangements, you may be responsible for purchasing the required licenses, which you can do online or in person.

If you're considering bringing home your catch, check with your airline whether it's possible and their requirements. Also note that on some charters, it's expected that any fish caught will be shared with the crew, who usually help with cleaning and filleting. (Don't forget to tip your crew!) Some resorts will also prepare your catch for a fee.

While there are many places to explore on both coasts, these five locations should top your list.



Deep-sea fishing Corcovado

Los Sueños Resort and Marina

Los Sueños Resort and Marina is a renowned fishing destination on the central Pacific coast. Situated on Herradura Bay, the resort stretches 1,100 acres and offers a five-star guest experience, with amenities like a spa and the championship La Iguana golf course.

The country's largest full-service marina, Los Sueños offers 200 slips for vessels up to 180 feet in length. The marina includes 30-, 50-, and 100-amp electrical, Wi-Fi, and fuel, and the surrounding resort and marina village has a commercial center with shops and restaurants, including sushi, seafood, and steak. Jimmy T's Provisions sits dockside, offering gourmet ingredients and ready-to-go meals.

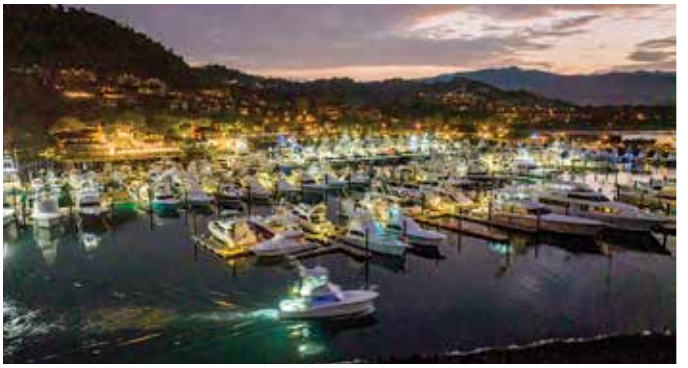
Recognized as one of the best saltwater fishing spots for billfish, the marina hosts an extensive fleet certified by the Costa Rican Ministry of Tourism. Guests can book inshore, offshore, and Fish Aggregating Devices (FAD) charters through Straight Up Sportfishing at the marina, with rates



Sportfishing boats in Los Sueños Marina

VISITCOSTARICA.COM







Clockwise: Los Sueños Resort and Marina hosts the Los Sueños Signature Triple Crown; Marina Papagayo in Guanacaste

starting from $1,200. Maverick Costa Rica Sportfish Charters is also located in the marina. The marina has been running fishing tournaments since 2004 and hosting the Los Sueños Signature Triple Crown since 2014. *lossuenos.com*; *straightupsportfishing.com*; *mavericksportfish.com/charter*

Marina Papagayo, Guanacaste

On the northern Pacific side, Peninsula Papagayo encompasses 1,400 acres of pristine natural beauty surrounded by stunning ocean waters. This popular destination boasts several exclusive hotels and resorts, including the Four Seasons and the Andaz Costa Rican Resort, with a wealth of amenities. Dining options are plentiful, ranging from locally inspired menus to steakhouses, Italian, and tapas.

Marina Papagayo, situated within Culebra Bay, is tucked away in the sheltered bay. The marina has 180 fully serviced berths for vessels up to 250 feet, fuel bunkering, and concierge services. The Ship's Store and gourmet market located in the marina make provisioning a snap.

The charter fleet on the peninsula is extensive, and guests can book a fishing charter at the marina or nearby to explore. CR Fishing Charters operates in the area and can handle most requests from half- to full-day inshore and offshore charters, which range from $500 to several thousand dollars, depending on the vessel. *peninsulapapagayo.com/marina*; *crfishingcharters.com*

Marina Pez Vela

Located in Quepos, Central Pacific—known as the "Billfish Capital of the World"—Marina Pez Vela offers 10 luxury two- to three-bedroom villas on the nearby commercial plaza's top floor. Another option within walking distance from the marina is boutique hotel Las Cascadas.

Marina Pez Vela has 195 berths for vessels up to 200 feet in length on a floating concrete dock. Amenities include fuel, 24/7 security, shore power, fiber optic Internet, and concierge services. The adjacent plaza has 30 commercial spaces with a grocery store, shopping, and various dining options, from local cuisine to gelato and Mexican food.

The marina is a hub for Costa Rica's sportfishing scene, with a large fleet including Caribsea Sportfishing, Quepos Fishing Charters, and Pez Loco. Inshore and offshore charter options include half-day, three-quarter-day, full-day, and multi-day charters. Caribsea's rates start at about $1,000 for a half-day inshore trip. Pez Loco specializes in full-day charters. The marina also hosts 10 fishing tournaments yearly, including the Summer Shootout

LOS SUEÑOS RESORT AND MARINA; FOUR SEASON RESORT PENINSULA PAPAGAYO



Clockwise: Marina Pez Vela is one spot to rest between fishing for mahi mahi, tuna, and sailfish in Costa Rica; billfish are catch and release for sustainability purposes; Crocodile Bay Marina is well-known for its sportfishing charters.

and the Marina Pez Vela Open. *marinapezvela.com*; *caribseasportfishing.com*

Marina Bahia Golfito and Banana Bay Marina

Located a stone's throw from each other, Marina Bahia Golfito and the Banana Bay Marina & Sportfishing Center sit along Golfito Bay, which is off the eastern side of Golfo Dulce, a haven for sport fishers.

Banana Bay's on-site hotel offers accommodations from standard rooms to suites, and a nearby grocery store makes provisioning convenient. The marina can accommodate boats up to 120 feet in length, with 20 feet of water below even at low tide. On-site amenities include a fuel dock, 110/120v shore power, Wi-Fi, dry dock services, and repair and maintenance options. Moorings are also available. Banana Bay offers half-, full-, and multi-day inshore and offshore charters through its sportfishing lodge. *bananabaymarinagolfito.com*

Marina Bahia Golfito is a 45-berth marina that can accommodate vessels up to 350 feet. Just steps from the dock is the new Amaka Ocean Living Lodge with 10 luxurious accommodations and two on-site restaurants. The marina complex is undergoing more sustainable development with new accommodations and amenities coming soon, including a Marriott hotel, but the Marina Plaza has a coffee shop, salon, pharmacy, and medical offices. *marinabahiagolfito.com*

Crocodile Bay Marina

Crocodile Bay Marina, located on the Osa Peninsula's southern Pacific Coast, offers prime access to the area's rich fishing grounds. Visitors can enjoy luxurious accommodations at the new Hilton Botánika Osa Peninsula, featuring a world-class spa and dining options ranging from farm-to-table cuisine to a casual bar and grill.

The marina houses the resort's sportfishing fleet and is expanding with the construction of a new marina featuring 140 slips for vessels up to 300 feet in length. This expansion will include fuel bunkering and a grocery store, with plans for a floating cinema restaurant, tiki bar, marina hotel, yacht club, and commercial space.

Crocodile Bay is well-known for its sportfishing charters, offering half-day inshore or offshore trips and full-day offshore charters starting at $1,500 for anglers of all skill levels. Guests can arrange multi-day packages combining fishing excursions with accommodations. Packages typically include fishing licenses, lunch, beverages, bait, and fishing gear. *crocodilebay.com*

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