

The Expat's Complete Guide

to Moving to Costa Rica

Practical, honest advice — no fluff

Published by AA Self Storage MiniBodegas · La Uruca, San José

Moving to Costa Rica is one of the best decisions you can make. The country offers a high quality of life, a stable democracy, excellent healthcare, and a warm culture that genuinely welcomes newcomers. But moving countries — even to paradise — requires careful planning, especially when it comes to your belongings.

This guide is written for real expats making real decisions. No fluff. Just honest, practical advice.

1. What to Bring from Home

Some things are significantly more expensive or harder to find in Costa Rica. Bring them if you can:

- **Electronics** — Laptops, tablets, quality headphones, smart home devices. Tariffs make electronics noticeably pricier here.
- **Prescription medications** — Bring a 3–6 month supply and the prescriptions. Many medications are available, but specific brands may not be.
- **Specialty clothing** — Good hiking boots, technical outdoor gear, professional dress clothes in larger sizes. Costa Rica excels at casual and tropical wear, but specialty sizes can be limited.
- **Tools and hardware** — Quality tools, if you work with your hands. Bring what you rely on.
- **Books and media** — Physical books in English are expensive. Digital is fine here, but your favorites are worth the luggage space.
- **Sentimental items** — Art, photos, heirlooms. These can't be replaced, and shipping them later is costly.

What not to bother with: Basic clothing, shoes in common sizes, household cleaning supplies, most kitchen staples, and anything IKEA-equivalent (Cemaco and EPA are solid local options).

2. What to Store vs. Ship vs. Sell

This is the most consequential decision expats make — and the one most people get wrong.

Store it when:

- You're not 100% sure you're staying permanently
- The item has sentimental or financial value but won't survive a humid climate without protection
- You want to keep your options open for a return visit or eventual repatriation

Ship it when:

- You're committed to staying and the item is essential to your daily life
- It's a high-value item that would cost more to replace than to ship (specialty furniture, professional equipment, musical instruments)
- Shipping cost is less than 50% of replacement value

Sell it when:

- You could replace it in Costa Rica for less than the hassle of storing or shipping
- It's large furniture that won't fit a Tico-scale home
- You're downsizing intentionally — Costa Rica tends to encourage a simpler lifestyle

The honest math: A 20-foot shipping container from the US costs \$2,500–\$5,000 and takes 6–8 weeks. A storage unit in San José from \$50/month gives you time to decide without pressure.

3. How Mini-Bodegas Work in Costa Rica

"Bodega" simply means storage in Spanish. Mini-bodegas (like ours) are self-storage units you rent month-to-month — no long-term commitments, no hidden fees.

Here's what makes Costa Rican mini-bodegas different from what you may be used to:

- **Pricing in USD** — Stable and predictable, not tied to colón fluctuations
- **Month-to-month only** — Most facilities, including ours, don't require long contracts
- **Physical access** — You keep your own lock. Staff doesn't enter your unit.
- **Security** — CCTV cameras, controlled access, and on-site staff during business hours
- **Sizes** — Range from tiny 2 m² units (boxes and clothes) to 36 m² warehouse-scale spaces

Mini-bodegas are commonly used by expats in transition, returning Ticos with goods abroad, small businesses needing overflow space, and seasonal residents managing two homes.

4. Climate Considerations for Your Belongings

Costa Rica's climate is beautiful — and merciless to unprepared belongings. The Central Valley (where San José sits) is mild, but humidity is a real factor.

What's at risk:

- **Paper and books** — Will mold in a damp environment. Store in sealed plastic bins.

- **Wood furniture** — Solid hardwoods fare better than particle board, which swells and warps.
- **Electronics** — Humidity + dust = corrosion over time. Use silica gel packs.
- **Leather** — Molds easily. Clean before storing, use a conditioner.
- **Artwork and photographs** — Frame under glass and store vertically. Avoid stacking.
- **Clothing** — Pack in vacuum-seal bags with cedar blocks. Avoid cardboard boxes.

What's fine: Metal, plastic, ceramics, glass, sealed containers, most sporting equipment.

A climate-controlled unit is the safest option for sensitive items. Ask about our unit options if you have specific concerns — we're happy to advise.

5. Checklist: Preparing Your Storage Unit

Before you move anything in, take 20 minutes to do this right:

- Clean everything before storing — especially fabric, leather, and kitchen items
- Photograph high-value items for insurance records
- Wrap fragile items in bubble wrap or moving blankets
- Use sturdy plastic bins instead of cardboard — cardboard absorbs moisture
- Add silica gel packets to electronics boxes and clothing containers
- Label every box on the side (not the top) so you can read them when stacked
- Stack heaviest items on the bottom, lightest on top
- Leave an aisle down the center of your unit so you can reach the back
- Keep an inventory list — a simple spreadsheet or phone note is enough
- Bring your own padlock — a quality disc lock is worth it

If you're storing a vehicle or large equipment, call us first — we can advise on the best unit size and any specific requirements.

6. About AA Self Storage MiniBodegas

We're a family-owned storage facility in La Uruca, San José — right next to Migración y Extranjería (Costa Rica's main immigration office), on the road to the Juan Santamaría International Airport.

We opened to serve the growing expat and local business community that needed flexible, trustworthy storage — and that's exactly what we deliver.

Our units range from \$50 to \$360/month USD:

Unit	Size	Best For	Price
A	1.5 x 1.5 m	Boxes, clothes, personal items	\$50/mo
B	2 x 2 m	Furniture, appliances, seasonal gear	\$80/mo
C	4 x 2.25 m	Business inventory, office overflow	\$200/mo

D	4 x 4.5 m	Full home contents, large business	\$180/mo
E	6 x 6 m	Warehouse-scale needs	\$360/mo

What we offer:

- ✓ CCTV security monitored 24/7
- ✓ English-speaking staff
- ✓ Month-to-month contracts — no long-term commitment
- ✓ Pricing in USD — no currency surprises
- ✓ Personal padlock — only you have access

Ready to get started?**WhatsApp us — we respond fast. English & español.**

WhatsApp: 8422-7985

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Mon–Fri 8am–5pm

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