



**United States Department of State
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors
Office of Inspector General**

Inspection of Embassy San José, Costa Rica



Embassy San Jose Chancery

Embassy San José is a mission in transition in a country in transition. The embassy operated without an Ambassador for more than a year before the current Ambassador's arrival in November 2005. The first-time deputy chief of mission (DCM) is also new, having arrived in August 2005. Heads of all U.S. agencies represented at this mission report that the new front office team is accessible to them when needed and that their concerns about substantive or management issues receive a fair hearing.

The new management team spent its first months learning how the mission operates and where it can and should make changes. The team is now moving ahead with the needed changes. This process began with the reorganization and streamlining of the mission's lengthy list of set-piece meetings. This will free up country team members to spend more time on their substantive duties and should help devolve more responsibility to section chiefs, a move in line with the Ambassador's goals.

The Ambassador and DCM are also honing mission objectives through an improved Mission Performance Plan. Promoting Costa Rica's adoption of the Central American-Dominican Republic-United States Free Trade Agreement remains the mission's top priority.

Costa Rica is in many ways a pleasant place to live and work, but it is not problem-free. The gap between expectations and the reality of living and working in Costa Rica is a primary factor in the mission's relatively low morale. Another factor is that budget restraints have driven the embassy to fill some positions with less costly Foreign Service nationals instead of suitably qualified eligible family members. More needs to be done to create a sense of team building within the mission and to foster cross-cultural understanding between the post's American and Costa Rican employees.

Costa Rica hosts more than 700,000 American tourists each year and is now home to over 30,000 Americans, mostly retirees. The growing number of resident and visiting Americans has taxed the consular section's ability to adequately address American citizens services. With the expected increased staffing, and the completion of a current project to expand the cramped consular offices, the consular section should be well positioned to give quality service to all clients.

The Ambassador and DCM provide the regional security office with solid support. The embassy's local guard and personal security programs are managed effectively, efficiently, and in alignment with Department policies. Residential security and increased personal security awareness training are helping to address the reality of rising crime rates in San José.

Background: Costa Rica

Costa Rica is a middle-income developing country with an emerging middle class. It is situated between Nicaragua and Panama, and it has a primarily Spanish-speaking population of 4.4 million people, with approximately 1.4 million residing in the capital city of San José. The relatively high standard of living (in comparison to other countries in Latin America) and low unemployment rate (about 6.5 percent) mask the serious problems besetting Costa Rica's economy.

For more than half a century, Costa Rica has been more democratic and stable than any of its neighbors. The country has just held its 15th successive open and free presidential election and President-elect Oscar Arias is an experienced leader of international renown. Costa Rica also has a larger middle class and a lower level of poverty than is the norm for Latin America.

Office of Inspector General

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