

CHAPTER ONE: PUDDLE JUMPERS, BRIGHT ORANGE TAXIS OR THE DREADED STICK SHIFT: FIGURING OUT THE BEST FORM OF TRANSPORTATION FOR YOU

Congratulations, your plane has arrived safely in San José, Costa Rica and you're on your way to the pacific coast hot spot of Quepos/Manuel Antonio!

As you walk through security at the Juan Santamaría Airport, one of the first things you will notice is a large mural that covers the wall to your right depicting vacationers zip lining through the rainforest—take that as a sneak preview to just one of the many exciting activities you will find here in beautiful Costa Rica! As you pass through security and head on downstairs to find your luggage, your eyes will be greeted by an ocean—no, not *that* one—of bright orange taxi cabs. (The orange ones are airport taxis; the rest of the licensed taxis in Costa Rica are red.) Now, unless you've arranged for a pick-up service at the airport (more on that in a bit), you will most likely be taking one of these tangerine-colored beauties for *some* part of the journey—whether it is to the bus station, a hotel for the evening or elsewhere. But don't be nervous; in my experience, these taxi drivers have been nothing short of honest, and even provide decent conversation along the way.

Yet, in Costa Rica the procedure for securing a taxi ride is a bit different than in the United States. Because these taxis are official airport taxis, one must pay *first* inside the airport at one of the designated booths, located right at the exit. The booth won't be hard to find—you will have ten men standing around asking you if you'd like a taxi. If you respond positively, they will guide you to a booth, where you will then tell them your destination and pay accordingly. From there, whichever taxi driver they assign to you will lead you to his car and *off you go!* As you can probably guess, they have predetermined rates for many different destinations, and if they aren't familiar with the particular place, they will base the cost on the distance to whichever general neighborhood you are traveling to. It is standard to include the neighborhood, or *barrio*, name in an address and the taxi driver will know where to go.

WHAT NOW?

So, at this point you've got quite a few options in getting to Quepos/Manuel Antonio. Let's discuss them all, and talk a little bit about which one might be your best choice based on your particular needs.

1) DOMESTIC FLIGHT

My personal favorite. Domestic flights from San José (affectionately referred to as “Chepe” by the locals) to Quepos/Manuel Antonio are offered by two companies, **Sansa** and **Nature Air**. Personally I would recommend flying Sansa because they fly out of the Juan Santamaría Airport (where you'll already be), and are an option that actually *doesn't* require you to take a taxi. Airport concierge will gladly assist you with your luggage and walk with you down to the Sansa offices. If you prefer to go at it alone, you simply need to walk left past the orange sea of taxis, march down the hill, and turn left again into a parking lot that will clearly state “SANSA.” Make your way through the parking lot and enter the small building on the far left-hand side, where you will be able to either check-in or purchase a ticket. Otherwise, Nature Air will also get you to Quepos, but you'll first have to take a taxi to Tobias Bolaños

Airport, also in San Jose but about 15 minutes away. I recommend making a reservation ahead of time, as these planes are small and only fit up to 12 people. Visit <http://www.flysansa.com> or <http://www.natureair.com> to do so.



Buckle Up, Everyone!

Sansa flights cost \$49 one way, or \$98 round trip and fly from San José to Quepos eight times daily during the high season (November 24th to April 22nd); once at 6am, 7:30am, 9am, 10:10am, 11:35am, 1:30pm, 2:40pm and 4:30pm. During low season (April 23 to November 22nd), the flight is offered only six times per day at 6am, 7:30am, 9am, 10:10am, 11:35am and at 1:30pm. On the other hand, Nature Air offers three daily trips from Chepe to Quepos at 6am, 9:30am, 1:30pm and 4:30pm during the high season (December 1st to April 30th), or three daily flights at 9:00am, 11:00am and 2:40pm during the low season (April 31st to November 30th). *Whew that was a mouthful!*

Let me tell you, these flights are *wonderful*. If you can get over the Indiana Jones-like flying style in a small, 12-passenger plane, then it is well worth it. A one-way flight lasts a short 15-20 minutes, and on top of that you get to see some fantastic sights of the country. Here's when that digital camera will come in handy for the first time!



Oh-so-picturesque mountain terrain while flying from San José to Quepos



View of Manuel Antonio from plane

The only downside to flying with either one of these companies is that they offer a very minimal free baggage allowance; Sansa twenty-two pounds of checked baggage, and Nature Air thirty. Now, unless you're traveling EXTREMELY light, you probably won't make the allowance, in which case you will be charged \$1 USD per additional pound of luggage. And if you happen to be one of the many surfers who flock to Costa Rica each year, you will be charged between \$10 and \$15 to fly with your board.

Who should hop a domestic flight?

Although flying is the most expensive form of transportation from San José to Quepos/Manuel Antonio, dishing out the extra buck (or \$100) is oftentimes well worth it. Here's when:

You only have a couple of days designated to spend in Quepos/Manuel Antonio.

Flying will get you there in 15-20 minutes, as opposed to some of the much lengthier options (a bus ride takes almost 4 hours . . . more on that in a bit).

You don't want to deal with the hassles of speaking Spanish.

The pilots all speak English very well, and will help to eliminate any confusion. Sometimes, taking the bus or renting a car can be complicated if you don't have any grasp on the Spanish language.

You get car sick.

Because Costa Rica is not equipped with an inter-coastal highway system, there is only one road that will take you from San José to Quepos/Costa Rica . . . and it's a windy, curvy one through the mountains that is sure to provoke a bit of nausea. But there are some breath-taking views if you're up for it.

You're an awful driver.

Costa Ricans don't always—let's just say—obey the rules of the road. I've always found it quite ironic that the country is known for operating on "Tico Time"—a very slow paced existence where no one is ever in a hurry to do anything—except when it comes to driving. Driving in Costa Rica is an adventure in itself, and may cause several mini-heart attacks as you get passed alongside a blind curve (way more common than you'd think). Please don't rent a car and take to the open road if you aren't prepared to be 100% alert and drive very defensively.

Upon arriving to Quepos by plane (both Sansa and Nature Air fly into the same airport in Quepos), it will seem as if you're in the middle of *absolutely nowhere*. I recommend going to see Frank at the Sansa counter, and asking him to call you a taxi. He lived in New Jersey for a period of time, and speaks very good English. If you're in luck, Harvey might be around and will take you to your destination in his mini-bus, charging you the same amount as a taxi and saving you the hassle of waiting for one. Either way, the ride into the town of Quepos is a short five minutes, or if you're headed up the hill directly to Manuel Antonio, it will last about ten.