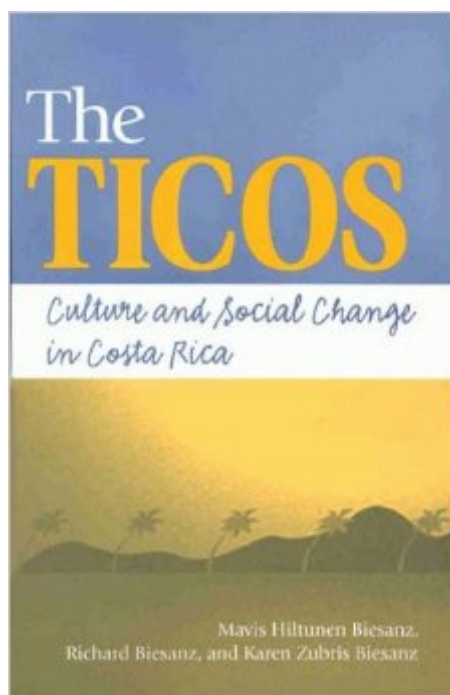


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The Ticos: Culture And Social Change In Costa Rica



Synopsis

Written with the perspective of more than half a century of first-hand observation, this unparalleled social and cultural history describes how Costa Rica's economy, government, education and health-care systems, family structures, religion, and other institutions have evolved, and how this evolution has affected and reflected people's daily lives, beliefs, and their values. The authors are particularly concerned with change and continuity since the economic crisis of the early 1980s and the structural adjustment that followed. Providing a comprehensive introduction to a country they know well, the Biesanzes also contribute astutely to an understanding of the reciprocal influence of structural adjustment and national culture.

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Customer Reviews

Heading for Costa Rica? Take The Ticos along with a guidebook. The Ticos is a fascinating and beautifully written account of Costa Rica, past and present. The authors bring to bear on the subject their more than half-century of residence in the country, as well as their formidable anthropological expertise. As a permanent resident of Costa Rica, I compared my own observations and experiences with those of the Bizantzs. For every topic examined - community, health care, religion, family, education and so forth, the authors' descriptions were consistent with my own, and their keen analyses deepened my understanding of the country I have adopted as my own. Beyond what The Ticos tells us about Costa Rica, this book is also extremely valuable for its examination of the effects of structural adjustment economic policies imposed on this country by the international financial institutions and by the United States (through bilateral agreements) as conditions for loans.

These policies are having the same deleterious effects worldwide on developing countries.

Normally, discussions of the impact of structural adjustment policies are abstract and academic. The Ticos, in contrast, provides us with a concrete and specific assessment of the "fall out" institution by institution, free of technical jargon. For foreign residents of Costa Rica (and prospective residents) I would say this book is a "must". But even short-term tourists will benefit from reading it.

After having spent a year in Costa Rica as an exchange student, I'm always looking for good reads about the Ticos and their culture. By pure chance I ended up at Barnes and Nobles one day and Richard Biesanz was doing a book signing for the collaborative book release. I found the book to be wonderfully insightful. Even if you aren't familiar with the Ticos you will find the book to be very interesting. The Biesanz let you look into all aspects of the life that the Costa Ricans lead, from the type of economy they have right down to their everyday lifestyle. From reading the book you will walk away with a better understanding of what makes the Ticos so special, and it will make you want to travel to Costa Rica and see it for yourself! It is a job well done! The Biesanz have a deep understanding and enjoyment of this culture and people, and you will feel that as you read the book.

This book was a little dry and psuedo-academic at times, considering the informal methods used by the authors. Chapters on history and economy read a little like high school history lessons but are informative none the less. The rest of the book moves more quickly and the subjects of culture, class and society are interesting. The major strength of this book is that it burts the mythical bubble of Costa Rica as a perfectly tolerant utopian paradise where all problems have been solved by universal health care and the welfare state. It instead paints a more humane, down to earth picture of contrasts and presents a view of the dynamic social and cultural forces at work in Costa Rica. Aside from the occasionally overly-academic tone, the only other drawback is the composite picture/ broad brush approach the authors use. Many generalizations are made relative to each of the subjects covered by the book, but arguably no book that sums up an entire culture could avoid doing this--so its moot compared to the eye opening revelations presented by the authors. Lots of "guide books" are written like second rate book reports by people with no familiarity with the culture or country. This book is tryly authentic. It is not marketed as a guide book, and that makes it an even better guide!

While Biesanz & company have produced a lucid and info-packed "insider's" book on Costa Rica, I still find that it comes in second to my favorite CR book, "Costa Rica: The Last Country The Gods

Made": a hybrid of a coffee-table book, a social/ political discussion and a geological history in a series of essays and sidebars. The Last Country The Gods Made truly does live up to it's scope of topics. Aside from geology and social history, it covers the political and economic history of the country and emphasizes its liberal reformist tradition as exceptional in Central America. I just like the writing better because the subjects are leavened by humor and, at times, almost poetical diction. Also, frankly, the photos are better! And the prices are comparable so, maybe check them both out! But if you're on a budget, just buy The Last Country.

I purchased this book at the airport in San Jose, Costa Rica at the end of a two week trip and read the book cover to cover on the way home to Los Angeles. It answered all my questions about why this is such a unique country. The book explained for instance why the town square was empty at San Isidro last Sunday: the World Cup soccer match was on TV. I would recommend this book to anyone who is planning to travel to Costa Rica or anyone who has completed a trip.

Don't just read the well known travel guide names before a trip. For Costa Rica, read this book for a more detailed picture of the people. I did before taking a two week trip with the family and church group. Well written, interesting, rich and full of detailed background on the people and differences from what one might expect from other Central American destinations, and how the reality may also differ from the reputation. Nevertheless the book was conclusory in many ways that seemed a bit much for a guide. If it is not a work of academic social study then perhaps the conclusions should not be so certain and abundant. On the other hand if the conclusions are going to be injected left and right maybe they should have stronger backing, citation, and bibliography. Also I felt the author's English perspective was a help on the one hand, but evinced a subtle anti-Catholic bias. Not any sort of animus, just a mild tone of disdain. I don't know if that is due to some kind of academic background, or cultural bias, or what. I'm not sure this helps with understanding a country that is officially Roman Catholic. Although I suppose it will help travellers who may share a similar bias, perhaps. Overall a worthy read prior to a visit but one that could use an update.

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