FREE BUYER'S GUIDE

Buying in Guanacaste as a Foreigner

A straightforward guide to purchasing property in Costa Rica — ownership rules, real costs, financing, and the step-by-step timeline, from someone who does this for a living.

Foreign Ownership Rights

Real Closing Costs

Financing Options

Step-by-Step Timeline

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GETTING STARTED

You can buy here. No local partner required.

Costa Rica is one of the more foreigner-friendly countries in Latin America when it comes to property rights.

Non-residents have the same legal right to own real estate as Costa Rican citizens — there is no requirement to have a local partner, no minimum residency period, and no restriction on the type of property you can hold, with one notable exception covered on the next page.

That said, "you're allowed to buy" and "you know how to buy safely" are two different things. This guide covers what actually happens between deciding you want a place in Guanacaste and holding the keys.

01

How ownership usually works

Most foreign buyers hold Costa Rican property one of two ways:

In your own name

Simple, direct, and perfectly legal. Common for buyers who want a single home and don't need extra liability separation.

Through an S.A. corporation

A Costa Rican Sociedad Anónima needs at least two shareholders. Separates the property from personal assets and simplifies a future sale (transferring shares instead of the property).

Cost to know: Forming an S.A. typically runs $500–$1,500 with a local attorney, plus roughly $400–$700/year in corporate tax. It does **not** lower the transfer tax or closing costs below — those apply either way.

02

The one big exception: the Maritime Zone

If a property sits within 200 meters of the mean high tide line on the Pacific coast — which covers a lot of ground in and around Guanacaste — special rules apply:

- **The first 50 meters** from the high tide line is public land. Nobody owns it, foreigner or Costa Rican.
- **The next 150 meters** is the "restricted zone," governed by a concession system rather than standard title. Foreigners without at least 5 years of Costa Rican legal residency cannot hold more than 49% of a concession.

Not every coastal-adjacent property in Guanacaste falls under this rule — plenty of listings are titled property outside the maritime zone, which behaves like any other property in the country. The Papagayo Peninsula, for example, runs under its own concession framework through the ICT (the national tourism institute).

> **The takeaway:** if a property is anywhere near the beach, always confirm in writing whether it's titled land or concession land before you get emotionally attached to it. This is a five-minute conversation with a good attorney that can save you a very bad surprise later.

03

What it actually costs

Beyond the purchase price, budget for closing costs in the range of **3%–4% of the property value**:

Item	Typical Cost
Property transfer tax	1.5% of the sale price (or registered value, if higher)
Documentary stamps	~0.5%
Notary / attorney fees	1%–1.5%
Registration fees	Included above, varies by province

The transfer tax is usually the buyer's responsibility, though this can be negotiated with the seller. Your closing attorney — who also acts as the notary in Costa Rica, the two roles are combined — will typically withhold and remit this on your behalf.

> **Don't forget the annual luxury home tax.** Separate from the transfer tax, Costa Rica taxes homes whose construction value exceeds a threshold recalculated each January — about ₡143M (~$315,000 USD) for 2026 — at rates starting near 0.25% and rising in tiers. Building only, not the lot. Declared and paid every January 15.

04

Financing: yes, it's possible

A common myth is that foreigners can only buy in Costa Rica with cash. That hasn't been true for a while. I work alongside two U.S.-based lenders who specialize in exactly this situation:

Second Street

U.S.-style 30-year fixed-rate mortgages in USD, for U.S. and Canadian buyers.

Volo Loans

U.S.-based financing that can close in as little as 30 days — no Costa Rican credit history required.

Both work with your existing U.S. credit and income, not a Costa Rican credit file you don't have. I'm happy to make an introduction to either.

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The step-by-step timeline

Most purchases move through the same basic sequence, typically taking **4–8 weeks start to finish**:

1. **Option to Purchase and Sale Agreement (OPSA).** You and the seller agree on price and terms in writing.
2. **Deposit into escrow.** Usually 10% of the purchase price, within about 7 business days of signing. Not legally required, but standard practice — your money is held by a neutral party until every condition is met.
3. **Due diligence period.** Typically 15–30 days. Your attorney verifies clear title, checks for liens, confirms surveyed boundaries, and reviews zoning and water availability.
4. **Closing.** Usually 1–2 weeks after due diligence clears. Funds are released, the deed is signed, and the transfer is registered.

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A short due diligence checklist

Before you sign anything binding, make sure your attorney has confirmed:

- ✓ Clear title with no liens, mortgages, or legal disputes attached
- ✓ The property's registered boundaries match what's actually on the ground
- ✓ Zoning allows what you intend to do with the property
- ✓ Water availability letter (disponibilidad de agua) if you plan to build
- ✓ Whether the property is titled land or maritime zone concession land

Questions? Let's talk before you commit to anything.

This guide covers the fundamentals, but every property and every buyer's situation is a little different. This is general information, not legal or financial advice — I'd always recommend having a Costa Rican real estate attorney review the specifics of any property before you sign. I'm not a lawyer, but I've walked enough buyers through this process to know where the real questions usually come up, and I'm glad to be a second set of eyes as you get started.

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