Northern Zone

A living laboratory that enhances sustainable development
## Northern Zone

**A Region of Costa Rica**

**Outside the Greater Metropolitan Area**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provinces</th>
<th>Cantons</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Total Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Provinces</td>
<td>6 Cantons</td>
<td>429,427</td>
<td>9,803 km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alajuela</td>
<td>San Carlos, Upala, Los Chiles, Guatuso, Rio Cuarto, Sarapiquí</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heredia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Location

- **From the country’s main airport, the Juan Santamaria International Airport (115 km):** 71.6 MILES
- **From Puerto Caldera on the Pacific Coast (125 km):** 77 MILES
- **From the border post of Peñas Blancas (188 km):** 117 MILES
- **189.3 miles from the Guanacaste Airport in the North Pacific (144 km):** 189.3 MILES
- **From the APM Terminals container terminal on the Caribbean coast (205 km):** 127 MILES
Why Invest in the Northern Zone?

01 Quality agricultural production and transformation:
The region concentrates 47% of the national pineapple production, 49% of organic production, and 31% of papaya grown. Companies in the area add value by making frozen fruit and vegetable as well as juice products.

02 Strategic location:
Connection point between the port of Moin in the Caribbean (only 120 km away) and the northern border with Central America.

03 Wellbeing tourism destination:
Home to the Arenal Volcano, one of the most emblematic tourist destinations in Costa Rica, surrounded by attractive adventure destinations and hot springs that promote health and wellbeing.

04 Technology and innovation ecosystem:
More than 12 information technology companies export software and value-added services to global markets. 9 universities and 3 research laboratories foster the development of biotechnology projects.

05 Facilitating regional investments and connections:
The Northern Zone Development Agency is a key agent that promotes collaboration between the local government, academic institutions, and the private sector to encourage the establishment of companies and foster the investment climate.
NORTHERN ZONE
A living laboratory that empowers sustainable development

PROSPERITY
With infrastructure that facilitates the transport of goods and redundant Internet that favors the development of high technology and biotechnology innovations

PERSON
With technical and university certifications that respond to the needs of sectors with investment potential

PLANET
Environmental using renewable energies and the protection of 7 wildlands that preserve key natural resources
Proven **Track Record**

National and multinational companies generating value for the region
Attractive Tax Incentives

Free Trade Zone Regime
Incentives and benefits granted by Costa Rica to companies making new investments in the country, pursuant to Law No. 7210

Incentives for investments outside the Greater Metropolitan Area
The country grants differentiated tax incentives to companies established outside the Greater Metropolitan Area
Free Zone Parks in the Northern Zone

MUELLE Park, San Carlos

Industrial Park for commercial, agribusiness, technology and logistics ventures

- Location: 105 km from the main airport of Costa Rica, Juan Santamaría Airport, and 188 km from the main port of Puerto Limón (APM Terminals)
- Allows construction from 200 m²
- 50 hectares available for development. First Stage: 17 ha
Prosperity

Sectors with investment potential in the NORTHERN ZONE

- Agribusiness & Food Industry
- Light manufacturing and Biomanufacturing
- Digital technologies and corporate services
- Tourism Infrastructure
NORTHERN ZONE

AGRICULTURE & FOOD INDUSTRY

INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITY
Agribusiness: exports
Agricultural products of the region represented 30% of the country’s agricultural exports in 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main products Exported (2021)</th>
<th>Main export Destinations (2021)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pineapple USD 721.1 million</td>
<td>U.S.A. USD 435.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other uncooked frozen fruit USD 78.7 million</td>
<td>The Netherlands USD 97.3 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassava USD 63.5 million</td>
<td>Belgium USD 70.9 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organic pineapple USD 9.5 million</td>
<td>Spain USD 70.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foliage, leaves and others USD 6.0 million</td>
<td>Italy USD 60.1 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

46 products exported to 66 destinations

* Exported value

Source: CINDE, based on data from PROCOMER, 2022
Agribusiness: production
Main agricultural products harvested in the region:

San Carlos
- Variety of crops and activities: cattle, cassava, goats, sheep, and poultry
- Main canton for pineapple cultivation

Upala
- Variety of crops: rice, beans, corn, and cattle
- Beans: 4,500 ha and 4,140 tons in 2020-2021
- Rice: 3,654 ha and 11,991 tons in 2020-2021

Sarapiqui
- Cattle
- Main canton for pineapple cultivation

Santa Rosa/Pocosol/Los Chiles
- Beans: 1,500 ha and 1,380 tons in 2020-2021
- Orange production

Non-traditional products: rambutan, guava, pepper, ipecac, moringa, turmeric, ginger, among other tropical roots

Source: CINDE, with data from the Agricultural Census of INEC (2014), MAG (2011), and SEPSA (2021)
Note: Figures collected by the pertinent business chambers and corporations, who in turn consult with producers. Data for Rio Cuarto not available.
# Food Industry

Value-added agricultural transformation in the area:
Export-grade juices, chips, and preserves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main products exported By the food industry (2021)</th>
<th>Main export destinations (2021)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fruit juice and concentrate USD 76.8 million</td>
<td>U.S.A. USD 51.2 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plantain or Banana chips USD 12.5 million</td>
<td>The Netherlands USD 20.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar USD 12.0 million</td>
<td>China USD 9.3 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared or preserved citrus fruits USD 8.9 million</td>
<td>Spain USD 8.9 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France USD 7.6 million</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Exported value

Source: CINDE, based on data from PROCOMER, 2022

21 products exported to 43 destinations
Food Industry
The region is a proven business partner for domestic and foreign companies

TicoFruit
Leading supplier of orange juice and over 18 different pineapple and orange by-products: bulk juice concentrate, juice, frozen pulp and essences, oils, and abrasives

Nicoverde
Producer and seller of pineapple and other fruits

| Started | 1988 |
| Location | Aguas Zarcas, San Carlos |
| Size | 100+ people |
| Source of capital | Nicaragua-Panama |

- Orange concentrate is produced from fresh fruit; the juice is extracted using FMC technology, and then pasteurized and concentrated in TASTE evaporators
- **The company processes:**
  - 1.5 billion oranges per year from independent growers
  - 100,000 tons of pineapples bought from local producers, and produce 6 different products
- **Export destinations:** United States, European Union, Asia

| Started | 2017 |
| Location | San Carlos |
| Size | • 120 local producers
  • + plant workers |
| Source of capital | Italy |
| Production capacity | • **Export destinations:** Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Ukraine, Spain, Germany, and France
  • Crops are supplied by more than 120 small producers from cooperatives and associations of La Cruz, Upala, Guatuso, Los Chiles, San Carlos, and Sarapiquí
  • The company manages all organic waste and bioinputs with the company Agrecicla |
NORTHERN ZONE

LIGHT MANUFACTURING AND BIOMANUFACTURING

INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITY
Food Industry
The Northern Zone offers competitive advantages for light manufacturing and biotechnology:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main products exported (2021)</th>
<th>Main export destinations (2021)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essential orange oils</td>
<td>U.S.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USD 6.6 million</td>
<td>USD 6.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organic or chemical fertilizers containing nitrates and phosphates</td>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USD 1.2 million</td>
<td>USD 0.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixtures of scents for the food or beverage industry</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USD 0.7 million</td>
<td>USD 0.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soaps and cleaning products</td>
<td>Jamaica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USD 0.4 million</td>
<td>USD 0.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pallets, box pallets and, other load boards</td>
<td>Panama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USD 0.4 million</td>
<td>USD 0.4 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Exported value

Source: CINDE, based on data from PROCOMER, 2022

51 products exported to 24 destinations
Food Industry
The region is a proven business partner for domestic and foreign companies

**Corrugados del Atlántico S.A.**

Production of 60,000 to 70,000 cardboard boxes each year
$40 million investment in new plant by Global Packaging Group

**Started**
2017

**Location**
Muelle, San Carlos

**Size**
200+

**Source of capital**
Costa Rica

- **Land**: 30ha for a cardboard box factory and 70 ha for the second stage with a free trade zone park
- **Strategic location**: 2 km from where the Vuelta de Kooper-Chilamate highway begins
- The Grupo operates a twin corrugator in Siquirres, Limón

**AGREP FORESTAL S.A.**

Production of biomass, sale of wood chips and pellets used as alternative fuel for steam production in its plants

**Started**
2010

**Location**
Muelle, San Carlos

**Size**
25-50

**Source of capital**
Costa Rica – Belgium

- It collects approximately 4,000 tons of raw materials per month from the area, selling 1,300 tons of finished products
- Wood pellet manufacturing steps: chipping, milling, drying, pelletizing, storage, and packaging
- Trade agreements. Bridgestone, Pyfosa, Gico, Marriott Hotel, among others
Food Industry
The region is a proven business partner for domestic and foreign companies

Manufacture of more than 66 organic and biodegradable products for agricultural, institutional, and residential use

- **Started**: 2007
- **Location**: Aguas Zarcas, San Carlos
- **Size**: 50+
- **Source of capital**: Costa Rica

- **Export destinations**: Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama
- **Products**: biological disinfectants and degreasers, biological control of pests and diseases, organic herbicides, biodegradable cleaning paper, planting substrates, and natural plant fertilizers
- **Certifications**: ISO 9001 (Quality) and ISO 14001 (Environmental)
NORTHERN ZONE

CORPORATE SERVICES AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITY
Corporate services and digital technologies

Over 12 local and multinational information technology companies provide services to national and global clients, creating 350 direct jobs in the region.

REGIONAL COORDINATION

Through the Chamber of Information and Communication Technology Entrepreneurs of the Northern Zone

- Since 2016, it supports the development of information technology businesses in the region and the creation of new ventures in this sector.
- It promotes the export of quality services: software development, graphic design, digital marketing.
- It groups technology services exporters of Costa Rican capital:

1. ENCORA
2. Compuval
3. Dinterweb
4. Level
5. GBSYS
6. GoLabs
7. Sulá Batsú
8. NCQ
9. NATIVO digital

INVESTMENT IN ACADEMIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Over USD 3 million in new facilities for the Technological Institute of Costa Rica in San Carlos, dedicated to R&D projects.

- In the region, the University promotes computer science, electronic engineering, industrial production engineering, natural sciences, and biotechnology.
# Corporate services and digital technologies

The region is a proven business partner for domestic and foreign companies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outsourcing in digital technology for the financial industry, social sciences, and education</th>
<th>Development of technology solutions through artificial intelligence, mobile and web development</th>
<th>Software development and technology outsourcing services for small and medium-sized companies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Started</strong></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>San Carlos</td>
<td>San Carlos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size</strong></td>
<td>1,200+</td>
<td>50+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source of capital</strong></td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Production capacity</strong></td>
<td>• It acquired Costa Rican company AVANTICA, which started operations in 1993 with software engineering services</td>
<td>• The company has business offices in Stamford, Connecticut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Service exports United States and Latin America</td>
<td>• <strong>Service export destinations.</strong> Silicon Valley, Canada, and Latin America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Offices in Latin America:</strong> Costa Rica (San José, Cartago, Liberia, San Carlos), Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia</td>
<td>• <strong>Technologies used:</strong> Android, iOS, Java, RoR, .NET; back-end and front-end development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NORTHERN ZONE

TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE

INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITY
Tourism Infrastructure

- La Fortuna de San Carlos is an ideal place to experience health and wellness tourism, with more than 12 hot springs.
- In 2019, the area received more than 800,000 tourists.

**Landscape diversity**
- Bird watching
- Waterfalls
- Exotic plants

**Main attractions**
- Arenal Volcano: last eruption in 1968
- La Fortuna Waterfall
- Arenal Hanging Bridges
- Arenal Lagoon
- Venado Caverns
- Hot springs

**One-of-a-kind hot springs**
- **Their water quality**, temperature, and flow highlight the region's healing qualities.
- **Benefits of hot springs**: used to treat rheumatism, skin and circulatory conditions, as gastric stimulants, and others.
Tourism Infrastructure

- Tourism in the region benefits from exclusive natural attractions
- Its natural wonders include the Arenal Volcano and the Caño Negro National Wildlife Refuge, which is included in the Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance

Protected Wildlands

- Arenal Volcano National Park
- Juan Castro Blanco National Park
- Border Corridor Wildlife Refuge
- Maquenque Wildlife Refuge
- La Selva Biological Station
- Selva Verde, Tirimbina Reserve

Adventure rivers and lakes

- Celeste River
- Sarapiqui River
- San Carlos River
- Frío River
- Arenal Lake
- Cote Lagoon
- Pocosol Lagoon
Tourism Infrastructure
Local airdromes allow tourists to reach strategic places inside & outside the Northern Zone

_UPALA AIRDROME_

- **Located in Upala**, border with Nicaragua, near Los Chiles and Guatuso
- **Handles flights to and from the Juan Santamaría International Airport**, as well as private charter flights that may also arrive in other regional airdromes
- **An investment of 1.2 billion colones was made to revamp the installations**: expansion and full improvement of the runway, security strips, horizontal demarcation, storm drains, and perimeter fence.

_FORTUNA AIRDROME_

- **Located in El Tanque**, approximately two kilometers east of La Fortuna, near the resorts and lodging accommodations near the Arenal Volcano.
- **Managed airstrip providing charter flights to and from San José** (Juan Santa María International Airport and Guanacaste Airport), Limón (Barra de Tortuguero in the Caribbean), and Quepos (Central Pacific).
- **In 2019, 7,199 passengers travelled** between La Fortuna and different airports and airdromes in the country.
Tourism Infrastructure
Proven experience in Tourism Infrastructure Development
Demographics
Total population demographics

429,427 Total
218,421 Women
211,006 Men

Population per canton
San Carlos
202,195
Sarapiqui
83,863
Upala
54,607
Los Chiles
34,033
Guatuso
19,432

Age distribution

0-10
10%
11-17
10%
18-25
14%
26-34
12%
35-44
13%
45-54
14%
55-64
14%
65+
11%

Data for Río Cuarto is not yet available since it was named as new canton in 2020

Source: CINDE, based on information from INEC, ENAHO 2021
Composition of the workforce

Economic sector

- Agriculture, livestock, silviculture, fishing: 30%
- Wholesale and retail commerce: 14%
- Food and lodging: 7%
- Education: 7%
- Manufacturing industry: 7%
- Households as employers: 8%
- Administrative and support services, other activities: 5%
- Construction: 5%
- Transportation and storage: 4%
- Other services activities: 4%
- Others: 9%

Workforce

- Total: 179,323
- Women: 65,055
- Men: 114,268

Economically Active Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>San Carlos</th>
<th>Sarapiqui</th>
<th>Upala</th>
<th>Los Chiles</th>
<th>Guatuso</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>88,354</td>
<td>34,889</td>
<td>23,276</td>
<td>14,021</td>
<td>8,477</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CINDE, based on information from INEC, ENAHO 2021

Data for Río Cuarto is not available since it was recently named as a canton.
Educational Opportunities

13 Technical Colleges

• Over 100 technical specialties offered in the Northern Zone
• Some technical specialties were created with the support of CINDE and validated by the industry based on their needs:
  - Accounting
  - Software development
  - Networks
  - Logistics and distribution chains
  - Service center executive
  - Cybersecurity

National Training Institute

• 6 head offices and offices in the region

High School

• 77 public schools located in 5 cantons
• 6 private schools located in 2 cantons

Source: MEP, 2021, INA, 2021
NOTE: you can find more details on educational opportunities by institution in this link.
Universities in the region

3 Public universities
Offering more than 80 majors, including:
- Accounting and finance
- Computer technology
- Customs Administration
- Foreign Trade
- Software Engineering
- Industrial Production Engineering

5 Private universities
Offering more than 40 majors, including:
- Human Resources Management
- Business Management
- Human Resources
- Marketing
- Accounting
- Hotel Management

Source: MEP, 2021 - Public and private universities - NOTE: you can find more details on educational opportunities by institution in the Annexes
Specialized Offerings

Research laboratories for biotechnological innovation generate value in the Northern Zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGRICULTURAL AND INDUSTRIAL TECHNICAL SCHOOL</th>
<th>INTERNATIONAL GENETIC CENTER OF CENTRAL AMERICA</th>
<th>STATE DISTANCE LEARNING UNIVERSITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biotechnology laboratory for in vitro plant treatment, genetic improvement, and biological control</td>
<td>Laboratory for research and genetic improvement in cattle, in vitro fertilization, and consulting</td>
<td>Tissue culture, phytoprotection, and science education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Clara, Florencia</td>
<td>Muelle, San Carlos</td>
<td>La Perla, La Fortuna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of establishment</td>
<td>Year of establishment</td>
<td>Year of establishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Electricity generation and telecommunications

The Northern Zone generates 16.6% of the national power production
- The Electricity Coverage Index is 99.4%, the same as the national average
- San Carlos has a higher coverage index: 99.8%
- Suppliers: ICE y COOPELESCA

Penetration of telecommunications
- 80.3% of inhabited homes have Internet access
- San Carlos has a penetration rate of 13.81%, the most connected canton in the region

Power plants and substations
- 12 hydroelectric plants; together, Arenal and Cariblanco have a production of 248 MW
- 6 power substations

Protected Biodiversity

The key to sustainability of ecosystem resources

1. **Conservation area:** Huétar Norte

2. **National parks:** Arenal and Juan Castro Blanco (significant water wealth)

3. **Flora and fauna typical of the area:** rainforests and fertile plains are home to aquatic birds, reptiles, mammals, and the tropical gar, a living fossil

4. **Wildlife refuges:**
   - Caño Negro
   - Las Camelas
   - Maquenque Wildlife Refuge
   - Border Corridor Wildlife Refuge
Protected Biodiversity

The key to sustainability of ecosystem resources

1. **Área de conservación** Huetar Norte

2. **Parques Nacionales:** Arenal y Juan Castro Blanco (importante riqueza hídrica)

3. **Flora y fauna característica de la zona:**
bosques húmedos y fértiles llanuras son hogar de aves acuáticas, reptiles, mamíferos y el prehistórico pez Gaspar

4. **Refugios de vida silvestre:**
   - Caño Negro
   - Las Camelias
   - Refugio de Vida Silvestre Maquenque
   - Refugio de Vida Silvestre Corredor Fronterizo
Protected Wildlands

Juan Castro Blanco National Water Park
• Significant water wealth to supply drinking water
• Electricity generation for cantons and communities in Alajuela
• 95% of its area is mountainous

Arenal Volcano National Park
• Located at the foot of the Tilarán Cordillera and the San Carlos Plains
• It is still active
• A living laboratory due to its geological and geomorphological richness and the complexity in the development of biological processes

Caño Negro
• Located in the lowlands of the Frío River basin in the Northern Plains
• Over 200 species of birds and others such as the giant anteater, ocelots, jaguars, monkeys, turtles, tropical gar, snook, and many more

Border Corridor Wildlife Refuge
• Strip of land on the border with Nicaragua, which runs from one side of the country to the other
• It has a variety of ecosystems and a rich wildlife, with important populations of jaguars, deer, coyotes and collared peccary, as well as palmipeds and waders

Source: CINDE, based on information from SINAC, Crinfolink, and Visit Costa Rica, 2018