

Tim's Tips for Learning Spanish
The REAL Costa Rica
www.therealcostarica.com

1. Start the process **before** you arrive by using the [Rosetta Stone](#) or some other language training system.
2. Pick a study program that excites you! Learning another language is really fun, but it is also annoying and frustrating. The right program will reduce the frustration and speed the learning.
3. It makes no difference if you say something correctly. Just the act of trying to speak will help you and your friends, home stay family or teachers can make the corrections. Remember, if you are nervous or embarrassed, and you don't speak at all, nobody can help you.
4. The larger your vocabulary in your native tongue, the harder it will be to learn a new language. Your very style of speech will not lend itself to direct translation as you may have 2-3 ways to say something. So, if you are "well spoken", give yourself slack as it will take you longer to be well spoken in another language.
5. Costa Rica is a very small country, but there are an incredible number of ways to speak Spanish. People from San José speak far differently than people from Zarcero. Folks from Guapiles speak way differently than people who live in Guanacaste. Women speak differently from men, and in MY opinion are easier (initially) to understand.

This tends truly "throw off" new learners. Expect it. It isn't you. It is them. To them it is nothing... like listening to a person from Alabama... but it will make you wonder if you are truly learning anything as you may simply not understand.

Same thing will go for YOU. After you learn Spanish, it will be with all the accents and idiosyncrasies of those who taught you. Couple THAT with any accent you bring from "home" and don't be shocked if the Ticos can't understand your Spanish at first try even if you are correct. Hell, ever try to understand a Boston taxi driver speaking English? Now imagine he retires to Costa Rica and learns Spanish. My Spanish is such that an immigration inspector at the airport thought I lived near Guapiles as much of my Spanish came from my wife who is from there!

6. Learn the Spanish alphabet. It will assist you learning how letters in Spanish are pronounced.

7. If for some reason you don't want to use a course like Rosetta Stone that has electronic analysis of your pronunciation, then find one that does. An accent is really nothing more than a mispronunciation of the word in another language. If those who taught you had crummy Spanish speaking skills, those will be passed to you as will your natural desire to pronounce Spanish words according to your native pronunciation tools. If you learn to pronounce the word exactly, you will have little or no accent. If you are a retired Boston cabby, forget it. There is no helping you.
8. Buy a GOOD English-Spanish Dictionary. I use [the University of Chicago Dictionary](#) which is pretty complete. Keep it handy. Try to read the headlines of Spanish newspapers. All of them can be found here.
9. Once you have some Spanish skills, start learning the slang or *dichos* (saying) of Costa Ricans. A good starting place is Chris Howard's hilarious book, [Guide to Costa Rican Spanish](#). It is really funny and more important, it is accurate.
10. Buy children's books like fairy tales! I am speaking of The Three Bears, Snow White and buy them with the big print for grades 1-3! First, you already know the story, Second, the translation is for KIDS who are now learning Spanish. Well that is YOU! They are easy to read, maybe 10-20 pages long with lots of pictures, and they are cheap. Read then aloud to a Tico friend and have them fix your pronunciation on the spot. It is fun and fast and then you can give them away to kids in your neighborhood when you are done. THEN, start buying books for grades 4-6 and so on.
11. Don't concern yourself with the tenses (past, future, etc.). When you first start learning Spanish, everything will be present tense, and you will sound (to Latins anyway) exactly like the stereotypical Pakistani owner of a 7-11 that is a staple in a lot US stand up comedy.
12. I have lost count of the times when I started to speak Spanish to some office worker, bank teller, sales person, etc. and was greeted with a blank stare and a "what?". I THINK that Ticos often do not expect Spanish to come from the mouth of a non Latin. For this reason, I developed a "trick". Instead of saying what I WANT right away, I instead speak some pleasantries like Good Morning, how are you? (In Spanish of course!) and respond to whatever it is they say... normally good, how are you? First, the words are SO common that no matter what, you WILL be understood. It also gives them a split second to adjust to the fact that you CAN speak their language. Then, continue with whatever it is you need. You will seldom have a problem after that... unless you drove a cab in Boston.

Most of all, make this fun. If you view it as a chore, it WILL be a chore.