

FLEYDO ENGLISH SCHOOL

Reading Challenge

The Country with No Army

*No soldiers. No tanks. No jets.
But one of the happiest countries on Earth.*

Level: A1

Skill: Reading

Duration: ~15 min

Age: Teens (11-16)

Topic: Places & Culture

Country: Costa Rica

The Article

Every country has an **army**. Right? Wrong. Costa Rica does not. This small country in Central America has no soldiers. No military bases. No tanks. No fighter jets. No weapons of war. It **abolished** its army in 1948. That was more than 75 years ago. And it is one of the best decisions any country has ever made.

Where Is Costa Rica?

Costa Rica is a small country. It is in Central America, between Nicaragua and Panama. The Pacific Ocean is on one side. The Caribbean Sea is on the other. The country is about the same size as Denmark or Switzerland. About five million people live there. The capital city is San Jose.

Costa Rica means "Rich Coast" in Spanish. A Spanish explorer named it in 1502. He thought there was gold there. There was not much gold. But the country is rich in other ways. It has beautiful beaches. It has **volcanoes** — more than 60 of them. It has thick **rainforests** full of monkeys, toucans, sloths, and colourful frogs. It is a very beautiful place.

What Happened in 1948?

In 1948, Costa Rica had a short civil war. It lasted 44 days. About 2,000 people died. It was terrible. After the war ended, a man named Jose Figueres became the new **president**. He had to decide: what kind of country do we want to be?

Figueres made a very brave choice. On 1 December 1948, he stood in front of a military building in San Jose. He held a big hammer. And he smashed a hole in the wall of the building. It was a symbol. He said: "We do not need an army. We need teachers. We need doctors. We need schools." Then he wrote it into the **constitution** — the most important document in the country. Article 12 says: "The army is abolished as a permanent institution." It is still there today. It is the law.

Where Did the Money Go?

An **army** costs a lot of money. Tanks are expensive. Fighter jets are very expensive. Soldiers need food, uniforms, training, and weapons. Many countries spend billions of dollars on their military every year. Costa Rica took all that money and spent it on something else.

Education. Costa Rica has free public **education** for all children. Primary school, secondary school, and university. The country spends about 8 percent of its **budget** on education. That is one of the highest in the world. Almost everyone in Costa Rica can read and write. The literacy rate is 98 percent.

Healthcare. Costa Rica has a public healthcare system. Everyone can see a doctor. Everyone can go to hospital. Life expectancy is about 80 years — higher than in the United States. A baby born in Costa Rica today will probably live longer than a baby born in many richer countries.

Nature. Costa Rica protects its **wildlife** like few other countries. About 25 percent of the land is protected — national parks, nature reserves, and biological corridors. One quarter of the whole country. That is extraordinary.

The Happiest Country

Costa Rica is often called one of the happiest countries in the world. In the Happy Planet Index — which measures how well countries turn resources into happy, long lives — Costa Rica has been number one several times. People live long. People are healthy. People have enough. And they seem to enjoy life more than people in many richer nations.

Costa Ricans have a phrase for this: "Pura Vida." It means "pure life." People say it all the time. Good morning? Pura Vida. How are you? Pura Vida. Thank you? Pura Vida. It is more than a greeting. It is a philosophy. It means: life is good. Be grateful. Be happy. Do not worry too much.

Is Costa Rica perfect? No. It has problems. Some people are poor. Some areas do not have good roads. Crime exists. It is a real country with real problems. But it has shown the world something important: you do not need guns to be safe. You do not need soldiers to be strong. You can choose a different path.

A Green Country

Costa Rica is very green. Not just the colour — the idea. It is one of the most environmentally friendly countries on Earth. In 2019, more than 98 percent of its electricity came from renewable sources. Water. Wind. Sun. **Volcano** heat. Almost no coal. Almost no oil.

The **biodiversity** is amazing. Costa Rica has only 0.03 percent of the world's land. But it has nearly 6 percent of all **wildlife species** on Earth. There are over 900 species of bird. Over 250 species of mammal. Over 175 species of amphibian. More butterfly species than in all of Africa. It is a tiny country with enormous nature.

The **rainforests** are full of life. Howler monkeys scream in the treetops. Sloths hang upside down and sleep for 15 hours a day. Toucans fly between the trees with their huge, colourful beaks. Tiny red frogs — poison dart frogs — sit on green leaves like small jewels. At night, the forest is loud with insects and frogs. It never stops.

Tourism: The New Economy

Tourism is very important for Costa Rica. About three million tourists visit every year. They come to see the **rainforests**. They come to see the **volcanoes**. They come to surf on the Pacific coast. They come to see turtles lay eggs on the beaches at night.

Costa Rica invented a type of tourism called "ecotourism." This means tourism that helps nature, not hurts it. Tourists stay in small lodges in the forest. They walk on trails. They watch birds. They learn about the trees and animals. The money they spend helps protect the forest. It pays for park rangers, research, and local communities. The animals are the attraction. Protecting them is good business.

But Is It Safe?

People always ask: "Is Costa Rica safe without an army?" The answer is yes. Costa Rica has not been in a war since 1948. It has good relationships with its neighbours. It has a police force for crime. And it has something more powerful than any army: respect. Other countries respect Costa Rica because it chose **peace**. It is hard to attack a country that has no weapons. What would be the point?

Costa Rica also helps other countries make **peace**. In 1987, the Costa Rican **president**, Oscar Arias, won the Nobel Peace Prize. He created a peace plan that helped end civil wars in Central America. A country with no army helped stop wars in other countries. That is power. Not the power of weapons. The power of ideas.

A Different Kind of Strength

Most countries measure strength in weapons. How many tanks do you have? How many soldiers? How many missiles? Costa Rica measures strength differently. How many children are in school? How many people can see a doctor? How many trees are still standing? How many birds are in the forest?

Jose Figueres smashed that wall in 1948 because he believed something simple: a country is only as strong as its people. Healthy people. Educated people. Free people. People who live in a beautiful place and know how to take care of it. He was right. Seventy-five years later, Costa Rica is proof.

The next time someone says you need an army to be safe, remember Costa Rica. A small country. No soldiers. No tanks. No jets. But free schools. Free hospitals. Protected forests. Clean energy. Happy people. And a phrase that says everything: Pura Vida. Pure life. It is enough.

Vocabulary Cards

Comprehension Quiz

Key Vocabulary

Word	Meaning
Army	A large group of soldiers who fight for a country
President	The leader of a country
Peace	A time when there is no war or fighting
Constitution	The most important laws of a country, written in one document
Education	Learning at school or university
Border	The line between two countries
Wildlife	Wild animals and plants that live in nature
Rainforest	A thick forest in a hot, wet part of the world
Democracy	A system where people vote to choose their leaders
Abolish	To officially end or stop something, like a law or a system
Budget	The amount of money a government or person has to spend
Healthcare	Medical services that keep people healthy
Tourism	The business of people travelling to visit places for fun
Volcano	A mountain with a hole at the top where hot rock and gas come out
Biodiversity	Many different kinds of plants and animals in one place

Comprehension Quiz

1. When did Costa Rica abolish its army?

- A) In 2001
- B) In 1948, after a short civil war
- C) In 1776
- D) It still has an army

2. What did Costa Rica do with the money it saved from not having an army?

- A) The president kept it
- B) They spent it on education, healthcare, and protecting nature
- C) They built a very big shopping centre
- D) They gave it to another country

3. What percentage of Costa Rica is protected nature?

- A) About 5 percent
- B) About 25 percent — one quarter of the whole country
- C) About 50 percent
- D) About 1 percent

4. What is the 'Pura Vida' philosophy?

- A) A type of Costa Rican food
- B) A way of life that means 'pure life' — being happy, relaxed, and grateful
- C) The name of the capital city
- D) A famous Costa Rican song

5. Why is Costa Rica a good example for other countries?

- A) Because it has the biggest army in the world
- B) Because it shows that a country can be safe and successful by choosing peace, education, and nature instead of military power
- C) Because it never rains there
- D) Because it is the largest country in Central America

Answer Key

#	Ans	Question
1	B	When did Costa Rica abolish its army?
2	B	What did Costa Rica do with the money it saved from not having an army?
3	B	What percentage of Costa Rica is protected nature?
4	B	What is the 'Pura Vida' philosophy?
5	B	Why is Costa Rica a good example for other countries?

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