

# **Branding the Costa Rican Nation**

## **Ecotourism and National Identity as Nation Branding Strategies**



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# Introduction

Costa Rica's nation brand is popular. Esencial Costa Rica, was awarded with 'Best Place Brand of the Year' at the international event that celebrates and awards the best practice in place branding, in 2019. With three more nominations, it performed better than most European countries. With the focus on sustainability and the involvement of its citizens and other organisations, the nation branding sets an example for other countries. And this is precisely what Costa Rica wants to achieve with its nation branding: to be a role model for the world.

Costa Rica's ambition is not surprising. Following the country's history, Costa Rica has always been different from other countries and is considered a unique country in Central America. It is the only country without an army, it is peaceful, and it is a democracy since the beginning of the last century. These features make the country very different from other Latin American countries, as many of them experienced military dictatorships and struggled with democracy. But Costa Rica is also known for something else. The country has up to 6% of the world's biodiversity in just 0.035 percent of the world's surface. It is full of wildlife, volcanoes, beaches, rain forests, while it is one of the smallest countries in Central America. Nature in Costa Rica did not always have priority. By the end of the last century, almost 80% of Costa Rica's forests were cleared for a variety of reasons. When this process was reversed by the implementation of certain policies and by the rise of initiatives, ecotourism started to contribute a large part to Costa Rica's economy. Eventually, the country became known as the world leader in ecotourism and the number one ecotourism destination for tourists. This image was promoted in tourism campaigns, but in the twenty-first century, Costa Rica wanted to show it was more than just nature and ecotourism. It also wanted to diversify its economy by attracting more foreign investment and increasing its exports. In order to do this, the country adopted a nation branding strategy: the creation of a country brand. Costa Rica created Esencial Costa Rica and started to promote itself as a country that is more than just its nature. As Esencial Costa Rica is one of the country's nation branding strategies, this thesis tries to capture what other nation branding strategies Costa Rica has adopted. To understand in what ways Costa Rica nation branded itself, this thesis will answer the question: Are national identity and ecotourism nation branding strategies in Costa Rica? The hypothesis of this thesis is that they are both nation branding strategies.

Costa Rica's nation branding is highly relevant to study. Not only is it a much-understudied topic, it can also function as an example for other countries. This is important as nation branding is getting more used over the years. Because of globalisation, countries are in a constant competition with one another. Nation branding can make a difference in this competition and consequently is interesting to study. But it is also interesting to see how Costa Rica's history, that was fundamentally different from other Central American countries, national identity, and ecotourism have been incorporated in nation branding strategies. These aspects are entrenched in the country, so it would make a lot of sense to use them for the promotion of the country.

Research conducted in this thesis makes use of secondary sources for the theoretical framework and the given context of Costa Rica. The analysis consists mostly out of primary sources. These primary sources are professionals working in ecotourism and nation branding in Costa Rica, surveys' responses of international tourists and Costa Ricans, and promotional material of the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism and Esencial Costa Rica.

The structure of the thesis is as follows. In chapter 1, the concept of nation branding, national identity, and ecotourism will be analysed. In the first section, it is explained what nation branding is, as well, as it will how it relates to a country image and why that is important. In the next section, national identity is described. National identity and its relation to the nation is explained, as well as the differences between national identity and nation brand identity. This fits well into the framework of nation branding. In the third section, ecotourism is analysed. As destination branding is a subtheme of nation branding, it is shortly explained what is and how it is used. This makes the example of ecotourism as a destination brand more understandable. Throughout the chapter, it becomes clear how nation branding connects all concepts.

In chapter 2, a brief history of Costa Rica is chronologically explained. Following the independence of Costa Rica, the nation building process is described. Subsequently, it is explained how the national identity is created and then shaped in the country. This is then followed by an explanation of how deforestation policies and the increase of tourism helped Costa Rica to become known as an ecotourism destination. Finally, the role of the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism is examined, as it was in charge of the promotion of the country's ecotourism. It also explains how the institute went from promoting tourism to branding the Costa Rican nation.

In chapter 3, nation branding in Costa Rica is analysed. The analysis starts with a section on how nation branding came about, and how it is perceived internationally. The second section is focused on an existing nation branding strategy: the country brand Esencial Costa Rica. It is analysed how the brand is promoted, both nationally and internationally. As it gives clear examples of how the country brand, but also the country itself is promoted, it is useful for the next sections. In the third section, it is analysed if Costa Rica's national identity is a nation branding strategy, through research, surveys, and knowledge of professionals. In the last section, a similar analysis is presented on whether ecotourism is a nation branding strategy in Costa Rica.

# Chapter 1

## **Nation Branding, National Identity, and Ecotourism: A Theoretical Framework**

In this chapter, the concepts of nation branding, national identity, and ecotourism will be discussed. The first topic that will be discussed is nation branding. It is important to understand what it is and what its goals are in order to understand the process of nation branding in Costa Rica. The next subject of this chapter is about national identity. In this part, the relation between nation and national identity will be made clear. It also aims to show the difference between national identity and nation brand identity. In the last section, ecotourism is explained, and it is argued that ecotourism can function as a destination brand, which is a part of nation branding. What becomes clear, is that all concepts are tightly linked together.

### **1.1 Nation Branding and Its Strategies: Country Image and Tourism**

Today, we live in a very globalised world. The world can be seen as one market, which means that every country, every city, and every region needs to compete with one another for consumers, tourists, entrepreneurs, students, talents, other groups of people “and for the attention and respect of the international media, of other governments, and the people of other countries” (Anholt 2007, 1). Borders of countries are becoming more and more permeable, and the world is becoming more homogenous, although the Corona pandemic has now inflicted a stop to the border permeability. This stop, however, is not likely to last a long period of time. Despite a globalising world, the nation state is not disappearing; globalisation has made nations and national identity even more fascinating (Olins 2014, 224-225). Countries are competing with each other and by doing so, use nation branding as one of their means.

Even though nation branding in and of itself is widely and often used and “steadily gaining more prominence” (Dinnie 2016, 13), because there are more and more countries that invest in nation branding, its definition and scope remain debated in the academic field (Kaneva 2011, 118). Brand consultant Simon Anholt was one of the first to coin the term nation branding (Kaneva 2011, 117) during the mid-1990s (Anholt 2011, 6). He is seen not only as the founding father of nation branding, but also as its main promotor. He has written many books on the topic and has worked as a consultant for numerous countries on how to nation brand. In

addition, he has developed several widely-recognised surveys, such as the Anholt Nation Brands Index, City Brands Index, and the State Brands index (Dinnie 2016).

There are several approaches to understanding and studying nation branding. According to Kaneva (2011), the scholars that have been studying nation branding have either a technical-economic, a political, or a cultural approach. The technical-economic approach believes that nation branding is more linked to marketing, whereas the political approach focuses on international relations and international communication. The cultural approach stems from media and cultural studies and have a stronger focus on the impact of nation branding on national and cultural identities. This shows that the literature and understanding on nation branding is far from homogenous (Kaneva 2011, 120-124).

As previously mentioned, nation branding is a debated concept in academic literature. There is discussion on what nation branding means and how it is used (Kaneva 2011, 118; Fan 2010, 100). For example, the terms destination branding, place branding or country branding are used interchangeably to refer to the same process, mostly depending on the author. There are several scholars who have studied nation branding and whose view on the subject is considered important. These scholars include Anholt (2006; 2009), Dinnie (2016), Aronczyk (2013), Fan (2010), and Kaneva (2011). Nation branding is, simply put, “applying corporate branding techniques to countries” (Teslik 2007). Put this way, it seems like nation branding is just a marketing strategy, while in reality it entails much more. Dinnie provides a more detailed definition of what he calls a nation brand: “the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences” (Dinnie, 2016, 15). It is important to note that this definition includes several aspects, such as the integration of the national identity and the importance of the audience. Another scholar defines a nation brand as “the total sum of all perceptions of a nation in the mind of the international stakeholders which may contain some of the following elements: people, place, culture/language, history, food, fashion, famous faces (celebrities), global brands etc.” (Fan 2010, 99). Fan includes more cultural means in his definition. Aronczyk sees nation branding as a means used by both commercial and public sector “to communicate national priorities among domestic and international populations for a variety of interrelated purposes” (Aronczyk, 2013, 2). One of the conclusions you can draw from these definitions is that nation branding is not simply a form of marketing, but includes political, economic, and cultural aspects with many stakeholders involved, such as a country’s government, commerce, non-



profit organisations, tourism, and the media (Dinnie 2006, 16). Nation branding is not in the hands of commercial marketing companies. Instead, governmental and quasi-governmental bodies are created to supervise the long-term nation branding process (Kaneva 2011, 118).

Now that we have an idea of the different definitions of nation branding, we need to take a look at its goals. When Anholt re-branded his own term of nation branding into collective identity (Fan 2010, 98), it laid out the goals of nation branding: he described collective identity as “the synthesis of brand management with public diplomacy, and with trade, investment, tourism, and export promotion” (Anholt 2007, 3). Olins argues that there are three markets in which there is a lot of competition between countries: tourism, investment, and export (Olins 2014, 226). The countries need to compete with one another, especially on these three areas. One of the ways to do that is using nation branding. Most of the scholars agree on the idea that nation branding is used for these three markets. For example, De Chernatony, professor of Brand Marketing, suggests that the goals of nation branding are “to attract tourists, to stimulate inward investment and to boost exports” (2016, 16). Teslik agrees with this view and adds a few more reasons: “luring foreign investment, facilitating trade, improving private-sector competitiveness, or even securing geopolitical influence” (Teslik 2007). In addition, Dinnie and Aronczyk mention several more goals, such as to attract talents (educated people from other countries) (Dinnie 2016, 17; Aronczyk 2013, 2), to “help restore international credibility and investor confidence, reverse international ratings downgrades, increase international political influence; stimulate stronger international partnerships, and enhance nation building” (Dinnie 2016, 17). Even though there are strong economic motives for the use of nation branding, Dinnie and Teslik show that there are also (geo-)political reasons, especially on a global scale. In the words of Aronczyk, nation branding does not only show that the nation is visible, but that the nation is also “well regarded in international circles” (2013, 2). Although nation branding has many goals, the three main goals are tourism, exports, and investment. In order to meet these goals, countries employ nation branding strategies.

An example of a nation branding strategy is the use and promotion of a country’s image. A country’s image is the people’s impression and beliefs of a place and could come from many things: “its geography, history, proclamations, art and music, famous citizens and other features” (Kotler and Gertner 2004, 42). When a country’s image is negative, a country can choose to try to turn it into a more positive one. It can strengthen its image by highlighting and showcasing what the country has to offer. However, in order for nation branding to be effective,

the image of the country needs to be as close as it can be to the reality, and it needs to be “believable, simple, appealing and distinctive” (Kotler and Gertner 2004, 47). There are many ways in which a country’s image can be formed. Anholt (2009, xi-xii) summarises the formation of a country’s image through the following six activities:

- 1) The promotion of tourism, as well as the first-hand experiences of tourists and businesspeople.
- 2) Exported products and services. If people know the origin of products or services, they associate them with the country or region.
- 3) A government’s policy decisions, through both foreign and domestic policies.
- 4) Business audiences form an image by the way a country tries to attract investments, and tries to recruit entrepreneurs, workers, researchers, and students from other countries,
- 5) Through cultural exchange, cultural exports, and sports,
- 6) Citizens of a country; it matters how they behave when they are in a different country, but also how they welcome people visiting their country.

These six activities are part of Anholt’s hexagon of Competitive Identity: tourism, brands, policy, investment, culture, and people (Anholt 2006, xii). Tourism is of particular importance in the context of nation branding, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

It is not only necessary to understand how country images are shaped, but also to know why country images are important. The main reason for this is that they can influence the decision people make about “purchasing, investing, changing residence or travelling” (Kotler and Gertner 2004, 42). As a country’s image can be either positive or negative, it is necessary for a country to highlight the positive country image or to change the negative image. This is what nation branding does too: it changes the opinion people have about a nation (Fan 2010, 102), removes any misconceptions people may have about that country, and it allows for the country to make itself more favourable when it comes to the target audience (Dinnie 2016, 18). Countries try to get a “positive foreign public opinion that will “boomerang” back home” (Aronczyk 2013, 2), in order to get consent or approval for their actions and to make their citizens proud and more patriotist (Ibid.).

Tourism is one of the ultimate goals of nation branding. Acknowledging the fact that 1.5 billion people arrived at destinations internationally in 2019 and that this trend has had sustainable

growth for ten years in a row (UNWTO 2020), it is easy to see why countries focus some of their nation branding efforts on tourism. Tourism ensures jobs in the tourist sector (hotels, airlines, restaurants etc.), increases tax revenue, and helps with the export of local products (Kotler and Gertner 2004, 48). Tourists are also important for mouth-to-mouth advertising. Once they have visited a country and had a positive or negative experience, they tend to prefer that country and the country's people, culture, politics, and products (Anholt 2009, xii). They will tell other people about the country and eventually, the country's image will improve. This is a virtuous circle, as an improved country image attracts more tourists, and more tourists improve the country's image. That is why "the integration of tourism and tourism promotion into the overall nation brand strategy is to be encouraged" (Anholt 2009, xiii). Moreover, tourism is an important aspect of nation brands (Jain and de Moya 2011, 346; Giannopoulos et al. 2011, 2) as well, as it is "often the most visibly promoted aspect of a nation brand" (Jain and de Moya 2011, 346). This is a direct result of governments and tourism boards spending a lot of money on promoting their countries globally. For many countries, tourism is one of the biggest sectors, making them the most revenue. At the same time, countries that solely focus on tourism and in which the tourism sector is the main economic sector can become unbalanced and fragile. Countries like these are perceived as a destination for tourism or leisure, and target groups, other than tourists, might not be as interested to invest, buy things, and work and live in these kind of countries (Anholt 2006, 99-100). One of the ways to promote tourism is destination branding, which will be more elaborately explained in subchapter 1.3.

## **1.2 National Identity: What Is It and What Is It Not?**

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, globalisation creates homogenisation and borders are becoming more porous. On the contrary, the sense of national identity is increasingly more important (Dinnie 2016, 20). National identity is now becoming more "concerned with competing with your neighbours to attract more economic activity than they do" (Olins 2014, 226). In a globalised world, where everything might seem homogenous, it is more important to hold on to one's own uniqueness, one's own identity. Logically, national identity plays an important role in the field of nation branding (Dinnie 2016, 111), making it relevant to understand this concept. Aronczyk even goes as far as to claim that nation branding is the "creation and communication of national identity" (Aronczyk 2013, 2). Nation branding indeed focuses on culture, history, and people of a country (Dinnie 2016, 111). National identity is thus an essential part of nation branding.

To understand national identity, we first consider the concept of nation. There is no consensus on what a nation is precisely or when it came into existence. The debate on nations is divided and controversial. Authors, who are often either historians or social scientists, mainly discuss two different concepts when it comes to a nation: the more political concept of a nation, the nation-state, and the more cultural concept of a nation, the cultural nation (Wodak et al. 2009, 18). When it comes to the nation-state, it is believed that nationality could only be found “in public law, that is the state” (Feichtinger 2012, 58). When there is unity in both government and in administration, this would give “rise to the equality of customs, laws and ways of thinking; and this unites different peoples (“nationalities”) [...] into a single state-nation” (Feichtinger 2012, 58). The proponents of cultural nation believe that the nation is based and defined by a “linguistically defined and ethnically based” culture (Wodak et al. 2009, 18).

One of the scholars that approaches the concept in a more political way, is Benedict Anderson. He defines the nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson 2006, 6). In his work, he explains that the nation is imagined, because the citizens of a nation will never meet each other, never see each other face-to-face, or never even talk to each other, but they are able to imagine their unity (Anderson 2006, 6). People believe that they share the same beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and sentiments (Hague 2010, 19). The nation is also limited because there are boundaries to a nation. These boundaries might be elastic, but they are finite, because there are other nations behind those boundaries (Anderson 2006, 6). This shows that there is more than one nation, and it is these other nations “against which self-definition can be constructed” (Hague 2010, 19). Nations are thus socially constructed. Moreover, the nation is also sovereign, because there is no monarchy that can claim authority over it. Before nations came into existence, there was mainly monarchic or religious order (Hague 2010, 19). Nations have changed the political order and created a bond between the people of the nation. Stuart Hall agrees with this view of an imagined community, as he argues that the nation is a symbolic community and this creates not only trust, but also a sense of identity (Hall 1996, 612).

In contrast, another important scholar on the topic that recognises the nation not as imagined or as a political unit, but rather as a cultural concept, is Anthony Smith. His definition of a nation is a “named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members” (Smith 1991, 14). The mentioned concepts and definitions include the

essential features of a national identity. It shows that the nation and national identity are complicated concepts in which “ethnical, cultural, territorial, economic, and legal-political” (Smith 1991, 14-15) features are embedded. The definition of Smith is still relevant, but it must be noted that some parts of the definition are currently less national because of the increasing supranational powers of regional organisations (Dinnie 2016, 112-113).

With an understanding of the nation, we can elaborate on what is meant by national identity. By looking at both the political and cultural concepts of nations, it is easy to see that the two terms nation and national identity are closely related. Note that national identity is not the same as someone’s citizenship or nationality nor is it only the place where someone is born (McCrone and Bechhofer 2015, 22). National identity is also not something you are born with, but something that is “formed and transformed within and in relation to representation” (Hall 1996, 612). A Costa Rican person is not born with his or her ‘Costa Ricanness’. Rather, it is something that is shaped and represented by Costa Rica’s national culture. But national identity is not necessarily cultural: Hall’s definition of national identity combines both the political and cultural concept, as a national identity offers “both membership of the political nation-state and identification with the national culture” (Hall 1996, 612). This identification is a sense of belonging. People need to feel they belong somewhere, as without this feeling, they could feel alienated and fragmented. However, when they feel they belong, they can function as members of society (McCrone and Bechhofer 2015, 10). One could argue the national identity is a psychological relation that nationals have and feel, and which bonds them together (Fan 2010, 101). Put differently, national identity is a “collective understanding by a nation’s people of the features presumed to be central and relatively permanent, and that distinguishes the nation from other nations” (Fan 2010, 101). This distinction, being different from another (nation), is also important in the context of national identity. It involves someone ‘other’ than you, something that you are not (McCrone and Bechhofer 2015, 17). National identity is one of the most important processes of othering – stigmatising others negatively (McCrone and Bechhofer 2015, 141). However, being different and unique is now perceived and used as something positive. Because of global homogenisation, the world is more fascinated with “difference and the marketing of ethnicity and “otherness”” (Hall 1996, 623). Highlighting the uniqueness and difference of a nation is needed in order to attract the target audiences (such as tourists, students, investors and so on) (Aronczyk 2013, 16). In short, the definition of national identity is the feeling of belonging to a group of people with which you share the same nation,

and that is different from other nations. The concept of national identity is also evidently intertwined with the concept of the nation.

Now that national identity is defined, we need to explain why it is an important concept. The explanation can be found in Fukuyama's work (2018). He argues that it is important and even "critical to maintaining a successful modern political order" (Fukuyama 2018, 9). There are a few reasons for this: national identity ensures physical security, it leads to good governance, it facilitates economic development, it promotes trust amongst people, it creates support for social safety nets, and it makes a liberal democracy possible. These are the functions of national identity, especially within the state. The physical security of a state can be ensured through national identity, as it will make a country much more stable and peaceful. A country without a national identity is more likely to be very divided, and therefore more unstable and weaker. In extreme cases, there could even be a breakdown of the state potentially resulting in a civil war. National identity is also useful for good governance (almost no corruption and efficient public services) of a country, as it will lead to state officials placing the public interest above their own (Fukuyama 2018, 8-10). National identity can also enhance economic development. People who are proud of their nation will be more ambitious to work for the nation or on its behalf. This only works when national identity is not the force of "protectionism against other nations" (Fukuyama 2018, 10). Moreover, national identity can promote trust. That can be created when people feel they have something to share with one another, like the same beliefs, values, and norms. When people have trust in both the state and in each other through their national identity, it can lead to the support of social safety nets. People are more likely to support social programmes if they feel this kind of trust, which helps the decline of economic inequality. It also works the other way around: when people do not feel this sense of trust and national identity, they see other nationals as competitors for the same resources. And finally, national identity enables a liberal democracy. In a liberal democracy, it is believed that the government will protect its citizen's rights. When citizens do not believe that "they are part of the same polity, the system will not function" (Fukuyama 2018, 11). However, as already mentioned, the national identity of a country can also be used as a nation branding strategy. States can try to exploit and highlight certain features of national identity "in order to shape national image perceptions" (Dinnie 2016, 116). The visual manifestations of national identity are also often used in nation branding. So, national identity is important because it can have many roles and positive consequences. Not only is it important for the security and the management of the state, it can also function as a tool of nation branding.

In the framework of nation branding, it is necessary to distinguish national identity from nation brand identity. These concepts are connected, but are not the same thing. A nation brand identity is the identity of a certain nation brand, but not of the nation itself. A country has only one national identity, but as it can have multiple nation brands, it can also have more than one nation brand identities. A nation brand identity can be recognised by a certain image or logo, that works as the identifier of the nation brand (Fan 2010, 99-101). In fact, a nation brand identity can be drawn from certain elements of the national identity. It would be impossible to use every element of national identity as nation brand identity, as the target audience would not want to know every single thing about the country's people, history, and culture (Dinnie 2016, 46). One visual element of national identity that is often used as a nation brand identity is the country's flag. Other visual elements are uniforms of the army or of other institutions, traditional clothing, or even landscapes (Dinnie 2016, 113-114).

### **1.3 Ecotourism as Destination Brand**

In today's world, tourists have an enormous amount of available destinations to go to. Countries are competing with one another in order to attract these tourists, and they do so by marketing their destination. This is actually called destination branding or place branding, which are sometimes used interchangeably with the term nation branding. But as Giannopoulos et al. argue, nation branding and destination branding have more of a field-subfield relation (Giannopoulos et al. 2011, 3). In any case, destination branding or place branding is more concerned with tourism, because destination branding means that a country (or a certain city of that country, a certain place) is promoted (branded) "as a destination for tourism" (Fan 2006, 6-7). Destination branding is attaching an idea or a theme to a destination, what is then promoted (McCoy 2010, 17). The full definition of a destination brand is given by Ritchie and Ritchie (1998) and which is later modified by Blain, Levy, and Ritchie (2005) as:

"the marketing activities (1) that support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates a destination; (2) that convey the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; and (3) that serve to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience, all with the intent purpose of

creating an image that influences consumers' decisions to visit the destination in question, as opposed to an alternative one" (In Blain, Levy, and Ritchie 2005, 331-332).

The definition of Blain, Levy, and Ritchie shows that countries need to be very unique, have a unique identity, and need to differentiate themselves from their competitors. This differentiation and unique identity are important, because it will persuade people, especially tourists, to choose a destination based on their feelings, not based on prices (Mikić, Bovan, and Jokić 2017, 59). As many countries and places offer the same or almost the same features – landscapes, history, people, or culture – effective destination branding can be the key to persuade people to prefer and to choose that country over another. Destination branding needs “a unique selling proposition that is sustainable, believable, and relevant” (Blain, Levy, Ritchie 2005, 331). It is something that other countries desire too, and could perhaps even copy, but it is also something that these countries cannot top or claim as their own. Countries often use authenticity to differentiate themselves from other countries. It is argued that all countries have “something that is uniquely theirs, and inherently competitive” (Mikić, Bovan, and Jokić 2017, 63) if only they look hard enough for it. Countries are able to show what they have to offer: ‘authentic’ tourism experiences, based on nature, products, services, infrastructure, and tradition (Jain and de Moya 2011, 340). But offering experiences is not only difficult to produce, it is also difficult to manage. This is because an experience entails many different things. Tourists are offered the whole package: from accommodation, transportation, food to attractions, recreation, and entertainment (Ritchie and Crouch 2003, 19).

Tourist destinations are perhaps one of the most difficult ‘products’ to market. This is because there are many different stakeholders, as well as it is difficult to fully manage brand images (Jain and de Moya 2011, 346). The organisations that are tasked with destination branding are called destination marketing organisations (DMOs) (Blain, Levy, Ritchie 2005, 328; Pike 2005, 2). This can be the tourism board or other tourist organisations of a country and are often “part of a political branch or subdivision” (Figuerola 2019). The DMOs are an extremely important part of the tourism industry (Blain, Levy, Ritchie 2005, 328), since they are tasked with creating an effective travel and tourism strategy (Figuerola 2019) and with marketing their destination (Blain, Levy, Ritchie 2005, 328). So, they are tasked with creating and managing the nation brand image (Jain and de Moya 2011, 346). The services that DMOs provide, which is mainly providing information to tourists either physically or online, are usually free for tourists. This is because the DMOs are reliant on funding from the government (Spike 2005,



2), that is they are funded “through hotel occupancy taxes, membership dues, improvement districts, and other government resources” (Figueroa 2019). Unfortunately, funding is often a problem for the DMOs, because they do not get as much money and revenue as corporate brands and must therefore constantly solicit for both public and private funding (Pike 2005, 4).

One interesting example of destination branding is ecotourism. Not only has the practice and concept of ecotourism grown and become important (Ritchie and Crouch 2003, 38), it has also become more visible within the last two decades. Ecotourism was the fastest growing tourism industry and countries were able to generate significant revenue from ecotourism (Carrier and Macleod 2005, 315). It arose as an alternative to mass tourism, which did not always have local communities and local resources in mind (Fennell 2008, 4). As people began to be more conscious about the environment and about the damage that was done to the tourist destinations, it is only understandable and perhaps natural that alternative tourism – one of which is ecotourism – became so popular. People are now choosing a destination not only based on price or on attractions, but also on the availability of ecotourism. People who specifically look for ecotourism destinations, are ecotourists. Yet, there are also people who go on holiday and like to do an ecotour, spend some nights in an ecolodge, or like the idea of ecotourism when they stumble upon it. It is definitely not exclusively for the tourists looking for eco destinations.

Ecotourism is not only concerned with the environment or the protection of tourist destinations. It must be noted that there is not one set definition for ecotourism, as there is much debate what it is and what it should include. The first person to coin the term, was Ceballos-Lascuráin in the 1980s (Fennell 2008, 17). His definition of ecotourism was:

“traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas” (In Fennell 2008, 17).

The concept of ecotourism has since been much debated. Courvisanos and Jain define ecotourism as something that is “about the preservation of the environment and promoting tourism such that the tourist does not harm the environment” (Courvisanos and Jain 2006, 132). This definition only focuses on the environment and tourism, whereas other scholars use more

elaborate definitions. Carrier and Macleod recognise that ecotourism should at least “protect and benefit the conservation, benefit, respect, and help empower local communities, and educate as well as entertain tourists (Carrier and Macleod 2005, 315). An important scholar on the topic of ecotourism, Fennell (2008), has developed his own definition by analysing 85 definitions and using his own experience:

“Ecotourism is a sustainable, non-invasive form of nature-based tourism that focuses primarily on learning about nature first-hand, and which is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented (control, benefits and scale). It typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation of such areas” (Fennell 2008, 24).

What the definitions have in common is that they first and foremost mention nature and its conservation in one way or another. However, there is also a clear idea of focusing on localness. The most widely accepted definition of ecotourism is the one given by the first ecotourism organisation, the International Ecotourism Society (Honey 2008, 6). It defines ecotourism as: “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of local people, and involves interpretation and education” (TIES, 2015). In essence, ecotourism concerns tourism that is beneficial for both areas and its conservation as well as for local people (Honey 2008, 7).

Ecotourism should however not be confused with nature tourism, wildlife tourism, or adventure tourism, because these forms of tourism only focus on recreational activities (Honey 2008, 7). Ecotourism can be considered a niche in the tourism market. This is also what Ritchie and Crouch argue: ecotourists are just one part of the whole market and ecotourism is “just another type of travel experience” (Ritchie and Crouch 2003, 49). Indeed, ecotourism is considered as an experience, but also as “a product [or] a destination” (Wight 1993, 3). It is becoming clear that ecotourism has become a buzz word for selling different products. It leads to the consumer not knowing what exactly he or she is getting or what kind of impact it has on the environment. After all, there is no doubt “that green sells” (Wight 1993, 4). Almost anything with the word ‘eco’ is increasing both interest and revenue – for example, ecotour, ecotravel, ecolodge etc. Ecotourism can and is exploited as a result.

There are two sorts of ecotourism: (1) the ‘genuine’ type of ecotourism, which protects the principles of ecotourism and makes sure they are put into practice and (2) ‘ecotourism lite’, which only holds up a façade and does not fundamentally change mass tourism practices (Honey 2008, 28). Genuine ecotourism tries to conserve “the resources upon which [it] is based” (Wright 1993, 3). People who are not interested in the genuine type of ecotourism, only think of ecotourism as something that can be marketed and makes them money. That is why certain projects that were originally created for mass tourism only changed their name, not their programs (Wright 1993, 4). Instead, ecotourism should be a way “for greening, not merely greenwashing, the entire industry” (*italics added*; Honey 2008, 28). It is, unfortunately, not always what it seems, and it is often difficult for tourists to see the difference between honest ecotourism and mass tourism disguised as ecotourism. In order to provide clarity, DMOs and other tourism institutions can often help. They can set up rules and regulations in order to distinguish ecotourism from mass tourism.

In this chapter, it has become clear what nation branding is and how it relates to national identity and (eco)tourism. In order to brand a nation, certain elements of the country can be promoted. This can either be the country image, the national identity, or the destination. In the following chapter, the concepts are applied to Costa Rica as we take a deeper look at the nation’s branding strategies, national identity and ecotourism.

## **Chapter 2**

# **Nation-Building, National Identity, and Nation Branding in Costa Rica**

As nation branding uses certain features of a nation's characteristics and identity, it is important to see how a nation and a national identity is formed. Because the focus in this thesis is on Costa Rica, we walk through Costa Rica's history from the moment it became independent to be able to analyse the building of its nation, its national identity, and nation branding. After the country's independence, Costa Rica began to transform into a democracy, and some important decisions were made, that influenced the country from that moment on. These events helped to create Costa Rica's national identity and the ruling class held on to earlier decisions to shape it even further. To continue the chronological timeline of Costa Rica's history, we point out the most important events which shaped the nature of the country. Costa Rica possesses incredible biodiversity and beautiful nature, which was jeopardised by deforestation policies and increased tourism. To reverse this process, ecotourism came into existence. By the end of the twentieth century, Costa Rica became the number one destination for ecotourism, the result of efforts of the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism creating a nation brand. In the last part of this chapter, we conclude with a description of how the process of nation branding is shaped by Costa Rica's history.

### **2.1 The Independence and Nation-Building of Costa Rica**

Costa Rica was colonised by the Spanish from the sixteenth century onwards. It was named "the Cinderella of Spanish colonies, for it was taxed, scolded, ignored, and kept miserably poor" (Biesanz et al. 1982, 16). Before being declared independent, there was not much desire for independence, as Costa Rica was much neglected by Spain for its open land and lack of indigenous people to enslave (Booth et al. 2015, 76; Shafer 1994, 185). Contrary to what was needed for independence in most other parts of Central America, Costa Rica gained independence without deep upheavals, bloody wars, or other violent events (Barrantes 1892, 165). Following the defeat of the Spanish in the Mexican War, Guatamala declared independence from Spain for the entirety of Central America in 1821. It led to a republican period in Costa Rica with much division and conflict. The four main cities (San José, Alajuela, Cartago and Heredia) all thought of themselves as independent and all aspired to become the

new capital city. It led to armed conflicts between the conservative and aristocratic leaders of Cartago and Heredia against the progressive and republican leaders of both San José and Alajuela. When the republicans of San José won this battle, San José became the capital city of Costa Rica in 1823 (Arias 2005, 21). In the same year, Costa Rica joined the Central American Federation (Biesanz et al. 1982, 18). This Federation existed of the Central American countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. It was aimed at being one strong and respectable nation existing of these five states (Barrantes 1892, 204-205). But during these years of being part of the Federation, Costa Rica started to set up its own government (Barrantes 1892, 187). In 1824, Juan Mora Fernández was elected as the first chief of state. He wanted to eliminate “the division and localism” (Biesanz et al. 1982, 18).

In 1838, Costa Rica experienced its second moment of independence, as it declared that it would be a sovereign state and that it would no longer join the Federation (Jain and De Moya 2011, 341). The second chief of state was Braulio Carrillo and he was also trying to unite Costa Rica. He ruled as a dictator from 1835 to 1842, and he beat anyone who was against national unity and integration. He was the ruler that created public administration and new laws in Costa Rica, ensuring that the Spanish system was eliminated or replaced. Centralising public affairs and making progress in revolutionizing the country were the reasons that Carrillo was called ‘the architect of the Costa Rican State’ (Arias 2005, 29). He also promoted coffee production, which had a long-lasting effect on economic, social, and political system of Costa Rica (Biesanz et al. 1982, 18; Kordick 2019, 21). Over the decades, coffee production soared and started to dominate the country’s exports.

Before the formation of the Republic of Costa Rica, the country could be thought of as a state, and Central America as the nation. It was in 1848 that Costa Rica became the Republic of Costa Rica. This was a turning point, as Costa Rica was now called and perceived as a nation. It became even clearer in the Constitution of 1859, in which was stated that: “The political association of all Costa Ricans constitutes a Nation called the Republic of Costa Rica”<sup>1</sup> (Acuña 1995, 145). But the nation was not without weaknesses: Costa Rica was a very small country with a small population and faced threats from foreign powers. This is why Costa Rica wanted

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<sup>1</sup> This is a quote in Spanish, translated by the author.

to be part of a Central American union throughout the nineteenth century. From the 1860s onwards, Costa Rica still wanted this union, but only if it were to be voluntary and peacefully and founded on conviction and reason (Acuña 1995, 145-146). Even though this desire for a political union lasted until 1922, a Central American union was not formed in that period. Eventually, Costa Rica gave up its desire and focused mainly on its own nation. When liberal dictator Tomás Guardia Gutiérrez took power in the late nineteenth century, he confiscated land from the elite, invested heavily in education – improving literacy – financed by coffee earnings and tax income, as well as build public facilities and new roads (Booth et al. 2015, 77). Increasing literacy meant it became difficult for aristocrats to block the general public from participating in politics, stabilizing the state. All in all, the investments were significant strides towards a modern liberal democracy.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, Costa Rica already focused some of its efforts on democracy. Public spending for education, a health system, and public institutions increased (Arias 2005, 57). Presidents were now elected democratically and there were very few disruptions in this process (Jones and Spadafora 2017, 151). There was however one exception: the brief civil war in 1948, which lasted for six weeks. In the civil war, the so-called ‘founding father’ of modern Costa Rica, José Figueres Ferrer, rebelled against and defeated Calderón and its (communist) allies and made some remarkable changes to the country while he ruled it temporarily (Booth et al. 2015, 74). He abolished the army, nationalised the banks, weakened the Communist militancy, and insisted on free elections (Jones and Spadafora 2017, 151). He believed that an army was not necessary and good police would be sufficient for the country. At the same time, a public-school system was created, and he supported the idea that “Costa Rica is a nonmilitarized society because the national character is innately pacific” (Kordick 2019, 119-122). Looking at the official textbooks of the public schools in Costa Rica from 1948 onwards, it becomes clear that the country’s public education focuses on highlighting “the centrality of peace and democracy to the national narrative” (Kordick 2019, 122). But it must be noted that throughout time, the narrative of the Costa Rican nation putting an emphasis on peace was overstated in textbooks. They even go as far as to state that peace was already the goal of Costa Rica since the first chief of state, although reality is that there have been quite a few uprisings and civil wars, making Costa Rica only peaceful after the Civil War of 1948 (Kordick 2019, 123-124).

In the years following 1948, Costa Rica has been a constant democracy with presidential elections every four years. The state continued to strengthen its social security system, political system and development programs under different governments (Booth et al. 2015, 74). In contrast to other countries in Central America, Costa Rica largely proved resilient against crises such as war in neighbouring countries and economic crises (commodity prices), for the most part because they had sworn off political repression. For example, Costa Rica did not respond with repression when crises in the 1970s led to lower wages, a lower living standard and subsequent unrest among its population, but instead fell back on what can be called its “accommodative traditions” (Booth et al. 2015, 79), that is its tradition to cater for the complaints and feelings of its citizens.

What is clear is that the 75 years following the independence of Costa Rica, where it struggled with coups and military regimes but did have some democratic elections, paved the way to a true democracy in the next century. To summarise, two factors played an important role in establishing a democracy in Costa Rica after its colonial period. The first is the fact that Costa Rica never really established a system of aristocrats holding land and exploiting slaves, for reasons mentioned in a previous paragraph. The second factor that contributed to Costa Rican democracy is the fact that the country managed to avoid the civil wars that tore apart so many of the other countries in Central America (Booth 1987, 43). Although not a major factor, Carillo’s focus on coffee production and plantations contributed to a wealthier Costa Rica and consequently gave the state the opportunity to invest in infrastructure and create public policies to secure coffee as an export product. Meanwhile, coffee workers benefited from labour shortages, keeping wages high and exploitation to a minimum (Schafer 1994, 186).

## **2.2 Costa Rica’s Unique National Identity**

The national identity of Costa Rica has not existed for a very long time. Until 1850, there was no such thing as the Costa Rican national identity or nationality, only the Central American nationality (Acuña 1995, 146). After Costa Rica became its own nation, the people were able to say that their nationality was Costa Rican. But nationality is not the same thing as national identity. The ruling class in Costa Rica has been shaping the national identity. They put an image (which was perhaps more imagined than real) forward that colonial Costa Rica was without a cast system, without social divisions, almost without slaves, without nobility, and that it was egalitarian and with uniform customs. Since the 1870s, politicians and intellectuals

wanted to identify the Costa Rican population as ‘white’ and to show that the indigenous population was small, with the desire to make them disappear altogether from the national image (Arias 2005, 61-62). That turned out to not be possible, but indigenous people were recognised as aliens to the Costa Rican nation, and people from African descent were hidden. From the 1880s onwards, the Costa Rican politicians started to popularise the national image of Costa Rica being “a peaceful, disciplined society, desirous of progress and, therefore, hard-working, white, and homogenous” (Arias 2005, 70). This new image became a part of Costa Rica.

As it turns out, Costa Rica’s national identity is based on a historical memory with selected historical events that benefits this image the most (Arias 2005, 64). It is called “*historical inversion*” (Sandoval-García 2004, 68) and it means that certain imaged or idealised ideas and events are made into “actual facts and into part of the national heritage” (Sandoval-García 2004, 68). Hence, it is not completely the process of nation building that has created and shaped the national identity, but the (highly appreciated, maybe even adapted) narrative of the past. To successfully spread and bring this created and shaped national identity into the minds of the population, schools and educational textbooks were used throughout the twentieth century (Arias 2005, 70). What they learned, is that Costa Rica is a unique country in Central America, with unique features. Both in the nineteenth and twentieth century, politicians and intellectuals have put an emphasis on “the uniqueness of Costa Rica” (Sandoval-García 2004, 62). This uniqueness is characterised by certain aspects: democracy, peace, and social equality, but also by the image of being ‘whiter’ than the rest of Central America. Nowadays, Costa Ricans describe their country as being “an educated, civilized, and white (i.e. nonindigenous but European) nation” (Kordick 2019, 147). They also believe they are different from their Central American countries because they have very different cultures and personalities. Especially Nicaraguans are the ‘other’ in the minds of Costa Ricans (Sandoval-García 2004, 62). Costa Ricans of all classes do not define themselves as Costa Ricans, but rather as *Ticos*, most likely coming from the word ‘hermanitos’ (little brothers). Costa Ricans or Ticos believe that they “have a unique way of life and a distinctive national character” (Biesanz et al. 1982, 8).

Costa Ricans believe that they are ‘white’ or at least ‘whiter’ than their Central American neighbours. They dismiss the idea that they are ‘mestizo’ (combination of European, Indian and/or African descent), but rather believe the national image that was presented to them from the nineteenth century onwards (Kordick 2019, 147). They believe that they are of full



European descent, as the Europeans colonised Costa Rica and the indigenous people lived too remotely from the colonisers. The Europeans also represented modernity and progress (Sandoval-García 2004, 66), which then would help to explain why Costa Rica was so quickly modernised and made a lot of progress after its independence. According to Rivers-Moore, “[p]rogress, modernity and development are woven together with whiteness” (Rivers-Moore 2007, 342) in Costa Rica. They could identify more with Europe than with the rest of Central America, underlining once more the uniqueness and difference of the Costa Rican nation, creating the Costa Rican exceptionalism (Sandoval-García 2004, 67). However, most historians, anthropologists, and geneticists have argued that more than half of the Costa Rican population consists of mestizos. The narrative that Costa Ricans are a ‘white’ population, however, was successfully propagated and now “widely accepted by the populace” (Kordick 2019, 147-148).

Costa Ricans also think of their country as peaceful. Not only is this because the army was abolished, but also because after gaining independence, Costa Rica tried to avoid conflicts and wars that other Central American countries actually did experience (Sandoval-García 2004, 68). This also reflects on the personalities of Ticos, who would generally try to avoid conflict. But democracy is maybe the most valued feature of the national identity amongst the Costa Ricans. Yet again, they are proud that they have followed a different path than their neighbours in Central America, which all struggled with military dictatorships. Costa Rica did not experience this, but instead, they had a strong “belief in free press and fair elections and in the rule of law” (Biesanz et al.1982, 9).

### **2.3 The Development of Ecotourism in Costa Rica**

Costa Rica has a lot of natural resources. It contains 5% to 6% of the world’s biodiversity in just 0.035 percent of the world’s surface (Sánchez 2018, 116; Jones and Spadafora 2017, 149; Jain and De Moya 2011, 341; Honey 2003, 40). This biodiversity is because of the country’s geographical location. It is located between two oceans, the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, and contains four big mountain ranges. This creates a mosaic of different weather systems and habitats in Costa Rica. Moreover, the country is part of the isthmus which connects two large and biologically very different landmasses of South America and North America. This also contributes to the large biodiversity. Add to that the tropical climate and it is clear why Costa Rico has such great biodiversity.

However, during the colonial period, the nature in Costa Rica needed to make way for monoculture, cattle, and the expansion of cities, because the population expanded (Sánchez 2018, 117). This continued onto the late twentieth century, as agriculture and livestock were still important to the economy of Costa Rica (Sánchez 2018, 117; Miller 2012, 59). High economic growth was experienced due to “the expansion of agricultural exports” (Miller 2012, 59) from the 1950s to the 1970s. But the increased agricultural production of mainly coffee, bananas, and cattle, harmed the environment. More and more forests were now removed to make way for agriculture, land for cattle, and the export of timber (Miller 2012, 59). But also “the overdevelopment of some of its sunny beaches” (Jones and Spadafora 2017, 149) had an immense impact on the nature. Between the years 1940 and 1980, 2.5 million hectares of forest were removed in Costa Rica (Jones and Spadafora 2017, 149-150), while the country experienced economic growth between the 1950s and 1970s. Costa Rica was also experiencing a growth in the number of tourists visiting the country (Miller 2012, 59-60). During this time, Costa Rica tried to improve its infrastructure and transportation. The country built railroads, expanded the Pan-American Highway, built an international airport near San José and started working on a second one. But by the late 1980s, Costa Rica “had cleared almost 80% of [its] original forest coverage” (Sánchez 2018, 117). In the minds of Costa Ricans, forests were worthless, and only the clearance of land showed “an individual’s reputation for hard work” (Miller 2012, 61). This mind-set together with the need for clearing land for economic purposes, did not motivate Costa Rica to take an interest in the conservation of nature.

Since World War II, more Costa Ricans began to travel within their country as there was economic growth and people had more leisure time to spend. This increase in domestic ecotourism already “helped to encourage entrepreneurship by Costa Rican entrepreneurs” (Miller 2012, 61) who quickly wanted to be part of this new market. Especially in the 1960s and 1970s, entrepreneurs built many hotels, resorts, attractions, and parks for the middle and upper class of Costa Rican society (Miller 2012, 61). There were not many foreign tourists, only a handful of scientists who wanted to study Costa Rica’s biodiversity until the 1980s (Rivers-Moore 2007, 344).

The process of deforestation did not stay unrecognised. Instead, environmentalists and the conservation movement in Costa Rica tried to push the government into creating solutions (Miller 2012, 59). As an attempt to reverse or halt this process, protected areas were created in

the 1960s and this effort spearheaded the conservation movement in Costa Rica. Conservation strategies were implemented from the 1960s onwards, such as “public protected areas management, designation of private conservation areas, reforestation programmes, watershed protection, scientific research” and so on (Sánchez 2018, 117-119). Combined with the creation of the national park system (NPS) in 1969 (Honey 2003, 40; Sánchez 2018, 123), these things were “a major impetus to ecotourism” (Jones and Spadafora 2017, 152) in Costa Rica. It was also in the 1970s that mass tourism became less and less desired. It did not bring as much foreign exchange as the people initially believed nor did it reduce poverty. At the same time, people were discovering the dark side of mass tourism: the “social ills” as Honey (2003, 41) calls them. These social ills include prostitution, crime, drugs and gambling, and other things. As a result, the responsible tourism movement was triggered. In the 1970s, the world-wide environment movement also aroused. The movement tried to raise public awareness for the conservation of rain forests, as they believed that they are important for biodiversity and they are oxygen suppliers for the world. At the same time, park officials, scientists, and local people started to realise that the way the national parks were handled, was not functioning. Instead of denying people access to the parks and blocking them completely, a new approach was needed. This is what the park officials, scientists, and activists demanded at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s. A balance between the local people and the nature would do the trick and this set off the ecotourism path in Costa Rica (Honey 2003, 41-42).

By the 1990s that the National Park System included 230 different protected areas, which put more than 25% of Costa Rica’s territory under some form of protection (Honey 2003, 40; Sánchez 2018, 123). Many of these areas have ecotourist attractions and activities, like ecolodges, bird watching, hiking, and rainforest canopies (Sánchez 2018, 123). To ensure that these attractions and activities are indeed ‘eco’, Costa Rica has created the Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) programme under which certificates are handed out to businesses that have incorporated sustainable policies and procedures (Jain and De Moya 2011, 341). These initiatives helped Costa Rica to quickly develop its ecotourism industry in the 1990s (Sánchez 2018, 123), which became a large contributor to Costa Rica’s economy (Rivers-Moore 2007, 344; Sánchez 2018, 122). In that time, the country “jumped to the head of the ecotourism queue” (Honey 2003, 40). It became a very popular tourist destination, and the U.S. Travel Society considered Costa Rica as the number one ecotourism destination in the world (Sánchez 2018, 123). Even though it was considered a developing country, Costa Rica is perceived as “a world leader in ecotourism as well as in environmental policy” (Miller 2012,

1), because it has been taking the lead in ecotourism and sustainable tourism (Jain and De Moya 2011, 341).

## **2.4 How the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism Nation Brands Costa Rica**

The institute that is tasked with monitoring and promoting tourism in Costa Rica is the autonomous Costa Rican Institute of Tourism (ICT, short for *Instituto Costarricense de Turismo*) (Jones and Spadafora 2017, 150). It used to be the National Tourism Council, but it was replaced by ICT in 1955 (Miller 2012, 61). They both had the objectives to mainly promote domestic travel, but ICT was also granted power to create and to protect national parks, even though that never happened (Jones and Spadafora 2017, 150; Miller 2012, 61). When international tourism became popular in the world, ICT started to promote “Costa Rica’s tourism attractions and destinations both at a national and international level” (Jain and De Moya 2011, 341).

At the end of the twentieth century, tourism quickly spread all over the world. This was no different for Costa Rica. In order to attract tourists, the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism created a “global tourism branding campaign, *No Artificial Ingredient[s]*” (Jain and De Moya 2011, 342) in 1996. This campaign was created to promote Costa Rica as an exotic ecotourism destination that would not be as expensive nor as far away as Asian countries. In order to convey this message to the world, social media and other marketing strategies were used (Jain and De Moya 2011, 342). The campaign was mainly focused on nature and the national parks in Costa Rica. It was only later that certain aspects, such as sustainability and comfort were added to the campaign (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo 2017, 21). Using the campaign, tourists were “invited to consume the Costa Rican nation” (Rivers-Moore 2007, 352). The campaign was only a promotion of (eco)tourism, and not part of Costa Rica’s nation branding. It took some time before a nation branding strategy was adopted in Costa Rica.

Since 2011, a new country brand has been developed in Costa Rica, called *Esencial Costa Rica* (Aguirre and Gómez 2018, 1), which replaced the *No Artificial Ingredient*-campaign. The brand was created to promote tourism and exports, and to attract foreign investment (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo 2017, 21). In addition, the brand was meant to advertise the “Costa Rican culture and uniqueness” (Esencial Costa Rica 2019). However, according to Melissa Tencio Alfaro of Esencial Costa Rica, the nation brand does not only exist to attract tourists. It

also represents the image of the country (M. Tencio, personal communication, Jan. 24, 2020). The brand Esencial Costa Rica was launched nationally in 2013, and internationally in 2014 (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo 2017, 21). At the same time, ICT was also creating materials and guidelines for the brand. Moreover, the Inter-Institutional Committee of the brand was created, existing of five different organisations: the Foreign Trade Promotion Board of Costa Rica (PROCOMER), the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism (ICT), the Costa Rican Coalition of Development Initiatives (CINDE), the Ministry of Foreign Trade (COMEX), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship (Esencial Costa Rica 2019c). These organisations show that Costa Rica’s branding efforts go beyond tourism with, for example, PROCOMER focusing on foreign trade and promoting exports (PROCOMER 2016).

Together with the new brand, materials and new organisations, a license protocol was created, which provides licenses to businesses in order to allow them to use the brand (Aguirre and Gómez 2018, 11). Since 2016, it started using the slogan: “You are the essence – we are all *Esencial Costa Rica*” (Esencial Costa Rica 2019c). The logo was specifically created to show three aspects: the nature – Costa Rica’s biodiversity, preservation, and sustainable development – by using the colour green, the “human side of the country: kindness, warmth, inventiveness, and abilities of the Costa Ricans” (Esencial Costa Rica 2019b) by writing ‘esencial’ in a handwritten font, and the “stability, modernity, seriousness, and dependability for investing and doing business” (Esencial Costa Rica 2019b) by using the word ‘Costa Rica’ in bold letters.



Fig. 1: Logo of Esencial Costa Rica. Source: Esencial Costa Rica 2019b.

As of 2020, there are now more than 400 tourism companies that are certified under the Certification for Sustainable Tourism programme. That is important, because only companies that have either the Certificate of Sustainable Tourism or a Tourist Declaration can apply for using the nation brand, Esencial Costa Rica (V. Calderón, personal communication, Dec. 16, 2019). So, the nation brand is not just a brand that is visible internationally, it is also recognisable within the country and within certain companies that abide to sustainable policies and procedures. It is very beneficial to be able to use or show the nation brand on your product or service. People that decide to make use of a service or product with the Esencial Costa Rica

brand logo can be sure that the product or service that is offered, has successfully passed the highest and most competitive process (V. Calderón, personal communication, Dec. 16, 2019). This process has five values of which the core is the Costa Rican culture: sustainability, origin, innovation, social progress, and excellence (M. Tencio, personal communication, Jan. 24, 2020).

Even though Esencial Costa Rica is the nation brand, the driver behind the brand is partially the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism. It is the governing body of tourism in Costa Rica, which ensures a sustainable tourism model, and is also in charge of promoting the country internationally as a sustainable and ecological destination (V. Calderón, personal communication, Dec. 16, 2019). It also recognises that the biodiversity, the culture, and the people of Costa Rica are attractive for tourists and transnational or international companies (Aguirre and Gómez 2018, 2). ICT positions Costa Rica as a tourist destination based on the quality of the visitors' experiences with high added value products, on sustainability, and on the idiosyncrasy and culture of the Costa Ricans (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo 2017, 74). The ICT is currently focused on the Plan Nacional de Desarrollo Turístico 2017-2021 (National Tourism Development Plan in English) (V. Calderón, personal communication, Dec. 16, 2019). The overall objective of this plan is to make sure that tourism is the main contributor to the Costa Rican economy "by promoting a sustainable, innovative, and inclusive tourism development to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life to which the nation aspires" (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo 2017, 75). It is evident that sustainable tourism is very important in the promotion of tourism in Costa Rica. However, it is also the Costa Rican culture that is often mentioned in the context of promoting Costa Rica.

In this chapter, a brief history of Costa Rica has been given. After a period of Spanish colonisation, Costa Rica became an independent nation in 1821. Over the next century, it gradually became its own nation. It set up its democracy, abolished the army, introduced public education, and became a peaceful nation since the beginning of the twentieth century. As a result of the formation of the Costa Rican nation, its national identity also came into existence. It was shaped by the country's ruling class, intellectuals, and politicians, as they created an image of a 'white', non-indigenous, and peaceful society. Combined with the aspects educated, civilised, and unique, it is the national identity of Costa Rica's society today. Another part of Costa Rica is ecotourism. It is explained how the reversal of deforestation led to ecotourism. By the 1990s, Costa Rica became the number one ecotourism destination and was known as

the poster child of ecotourism. In order to promote this to the world, the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism created a global tourism campaign. It was replaced by the country brand Esencial Costa Rica in 2011, the moment that Costa Rica focused some of its efforts on nation branding. How the country nation branded and what its nation brand strategies are, is explained in chapter 3.

## Chapter 3

### Selling the Costa Rican Nation

In this chapter, I will analyse the nation branding of Costa Rica. First, the nation branding process in Costa Rica is elaborated on in detail. Then, the nation brand of Costa Rica is analysed with examples of how Esencial Costa Rica is promoted. This will give an idea of how the country is nation branded. In the third section, it will be analysed whether the national identity of Costa Rica can be considered a nation branding strategy. Finally, I analyse whether ecotourism can be considered a nation branding strategy or not. Throughout the chapter, different research materials are used that were collected during a research period in Costa Rica. It includes the expertise of interviewees, the opinions of international tourists and Ticos, promotional materials of ICT and Esencial Costa Rica, and other advertisements.

#### 3.1 Costa Rica's Promotion of Tourism to Branding the Nation

When tourism increased at the end of the twentieth century, Costa Rica wanted to enjoy its share. The country's efforts and the *No Artificial Ingredient* tourism campaign were focused on branding Costa Rica as a tourist destination and "to improve the performance of Costa Rica as a destiny" (FutureBrand 2020). With this focus on tourism and destination branding, the country became known as a tourist destination with an intrinsic link to nature. But at some point, the country wanted to show it was more than just nature and had the aspirations to attract both investment and foreign trade. That is why the country started to use nation branding and a country brand strategy.

Since 2002, the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism tried to differentiate Costa Rica from regional and global competitors. Countries that have the ambition to promote themselves and be different from their direct competitors, can choose to develop a country brand. A country's position in the global market can be enhanced through strategic nation branding (Kotler and Gertner 2002, 253). A country brand leads to a tangible, distinctive, and visual representation that consumers or tourists can recognise and remember. This representation can be for example a slogan, a symbol, or it can be a specific set of colours (Marcela and Milena 2007, 7). It could also be a name, term, or a combination of them (Kotler and Gertner 2002, 249).



Up until the creation of the nation brand, the country was only promoted by separate institutions. The Costa Rican Institute of Tourism solely promoted tourism with their *No Artificial Ingredients*-campaign, the Foreign Trade Promotion Board of Costa Rica promoted Costa Rican exports with their *Quality Without Borders*-campaign, the Costa Rican Coalition of Development Initiatives was only focused on attracting investors with their *People who make the difference*-campaign, and so on. The institutions were barely collaborating. To ensure the country brands' success, the different sectors and actors that are involved, need to work together (Marcela and Milena 2007, 11). In the case of Costa Rica's brand, a multi-sectoral committee came into existence tasked with governing and managing the brand (Embajada de Costa Rica 2020). The committee is also responsible for involving and collaborating with the private sector and the Costa Rican citizens (City Nation Place 2020). This does not mean that the institutions that are part of this committee will not continue to focus on the promotion of their own sector. The Foreign Trade Promotion Board still focuses its efforts on exports, while the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism is still tasked with promoting tourism and the promotion of Costa Rica as tourist destination and they do so by creating campaigns that fit well with the nation brand.

While creating Costa Rica's nation brand and its strategies, it used four elements that are essential for successful nation branding: a brand strategy based on a central idea, a suitable organisational committee, good measurement processes, and the management of a digital identity (City Nation Place 2020). Costa Rica's country brand expresses a central, articulated and consistent idea of the country, something that differentiates it from its competitors (Embajada de Costa Rica 2020). As its central idea, it wants to be perceived as a role model for the world (Bloom Consulting 2020; City Nation Place 2020). It therefore focuses much of its efforts and policies on this idea, which help to change people's perception of Costa Rica. Having one central idea also helps to manage the reputation of the country. As has already been mentioned, Costa Rica also uses the element of good organisational structure by creating an inter-institutional committee. With regard to the measurement process, Costa Rica has hired external companies to do so. Just a few years after the nation brand was launched, Bloom Consulting, an international country brand consulting company from Spain, and Placematters, a place brand strategy company from the United Kingdom, were hired to "evaluate the impact of the Country Brand Strategy of Costa Rica and the "Essential Costa Rica" brand" (Bloom Consulting and Placematters 2017). They carried out a detailed investigation of perceptions of

the country brand to assess Costa Rica's international attractiveness. The two companies also researched Costa Rica's performance internationally and looked at how well the country brand performed compared to its competitors. And finally, Costa Rica also worked on the fourth element to make its nation branding efforts successful: a digital identity. It is managing its digital identity, as well as it is trying to understand its digital reputation. The director of Esencial Costa Rica explains its use: "Digital identity shortens the gap between what people know about Costa Rica and what Costa Rica really is" (Bloom Consulting 2020). The country has been understanding the importance of social media, television, and digital advertising. An example of this, is the tourism campaign *Costa Rica, My Choice, Naturally*, created in 2017. The country has alliances with UNWTO and the CNN International and CNN Tourism Advertising Solutions to promote it more digitally and internationally (Alvarado 2017).

Costa Rica's efforts in branding its nation have not gone unnoticed and have arguably been fruitful for the country. Esencial Costa Rica is getting more and more attention and recognition of investors, buyers, and tourists. It has been in the news for many different, positive reasons. The most important reason is its strategic positioning (Bloom Consulting 2020). In 2019, at the City Nation Place Awards in London – the event that celebrates and awards the best practice in place branding (including city branding and nation branding) – Esencial Costa Rica was nominated in four categories. It was only surpassed by Finland in the amount of nominations. The categories in which the brand was nominated, were Place and Brand of the Year, Best Use of Social Networks, Best Communication Strategy, and Greater Citizen Engagement. Esencial Costa Rica was then awarded "Best Place Brand of the Year" (PROCOMER 2019; City Nation Place 2020). The country brand was given this award because of "its commitment to a sustainable and multifaceted strategy and its belief in the potential for the place brand to unite an entire nation" (City Nation Place 2020). With its idea of sustainability and preservation, and the involvement of both citizens and other organisations, the nation branding of Costa Rica sets an example for other brands (Bloom Consulting 2020). This has been the central idea of the country, so it shows that the nation branding of Costa Rica has come a long way. But other than that, Costa Rica has been winning more awards. The country won 10 awards during the World Travel Awards (the Oscars of Tourism), with awards such as "Best Destination in Central America and Mexico 2019", "Best Wildlife and Nature Destination 2019" (Bloom Consulting 2020). Costa Rica is still a tourism destination linked to nature, but the country is also getting recognised for its nation branding efforts.

### 3.2 The Role of Esencial Costa Rica in Costa Rica's Nation Branding

One of the most important aspects of nation branding in Costa Rica is the country's nation brand. It is relatively new, as it only came into existence in 2011. According to the website of Esencial Costa Rica, it is the only green brand in the world (Esencial Costa Rica 2019b). This is due to its strong aspirations towards sustainable and environmental development. However, the environment is not the only factor of the country brand, but the Costa Rican people and its culture are also included (Aguirre and Gómez 2018, 14). Through Esencial Costa Rica, the country projects itself to the world promoting tourism, investments, and exports, which go hand in hand with the Costa Rican culture and idiosyncrasy (Esencial Costa Rica 2019). According to the general manager of ICT, Esencial Costa Rica is a strategy of the country, and it is part of the public policies (R.R. Chaves, personal communication, Jan. 24, 2020). The brand has two criteria under which it moves: country positioning and country competitiveness. The country positioning is showing characteristics to the world that describe the people and the country as Costa Rica; as "Pura Vida", charismatic, specialised, "empuchados", and talented. The country competitiveness ensures and guarantees that companies who have the license to use the country brand, are representing the values of Esencial Costa Rica: excellence, sustainability, innovation, social progress, and Costa Rican origin (Esencial Costa Rica 2019b). As the goals of Costa Rica's nation brand are already explained, it is important to have a look at examples of how the brand is promoted, both in Costa Rica and internationally.

The nation brand Esencial Costa Rica and subsequently, the country of Costa Rica, are promoted in several ways. For the most part, the marketing department of Esencial Costa Rica is responsible for its promotion and the promotion of Costa Rica in general. It therefore visits international travel and tourism fairs, congresses, and summits throughout the world. It also goes to hotels and other tourist organisations in order to inform them about the brand, and to hand out promotional materials. Furthermore, it is in contact with the New York Times panel that writes about Costa Rica (M. Tencio, personal communication, Jan. 24, 2020). There are also other advertisements of the brand in several countries, like France, Spain, and the United States. The brand and Costa Rica's *Only The Essentials*-campaign can be found on the outside of a metro in the city of Chicago, and on the outside of a tram in Madrid and Barcelona. In Paris, Bordeaux, and Lyon, there are electric vehicles that promote the sustainability of Costa Rica, while the nation brand is clearly visible (see Appendix 1: Promotion of Esencial Costa

Rica Abroad; V. Calderón, personal communication, Dec. 16, 2019). The country clearly put in a great deal of effort to promote Esencial Costa Rica in Europe and in the United States.

Esencial Costa Rica is not only promoted internationally. Within Costa Rica, the nation brand is quite visible as well. The brand can be found on tourist maps (created by ICT), on certain export products that have the license to use the brand, and within certain organisations. For example, some theme parks (adventure park, nature park and so on), restaurants, accommodation, tour operators, and rental car companies are licensed (Turismo Sostenible 2019). This means that they are allowed to present Esencial Costa Rica on their business' cards, at their reception, or on their information leaflets. The place where Esencial Costa Rica is perhaps the most visible, is the international airport of San José. Upon arrival, travellers will see the nation brand and images of Costa Rica's nature on the walls and on posters throughout the airport.

There are not only psychical advertisements of the nation brand. Esencial Costa Rica also has an online presence. For starters, Costa Rica has its own documentary that is distributed internationally. It is a monthly documentary, distributed by CNN, that reaches both homes and hotels. For the Latin American region, the documentary *Destinos Costa Rica* is in Spanish, while the English version *Destination Costa Rica* is distributed to the U.S., Europe, Middle East, Africa, and Asia (Alvarado 2017). Another online promotion tool is the YouTube videos created by Esencial Costa Rica. It is interesting to examine the video of 2013<sup>2</sup>, as this shows what features of Costa Rica are used for its promotion. Specific features of Costa Rica are shown in the video. In the first thirty seconds, it becomes clear what kind of natural attractions the country has to offer to tourists. It centres around Costa Rica's biodiversity, showing animals living in Costa Rica and some of the country's attractions, such as waterfalls, a volcano, a beach, ziplining, water rafting, and surfing. What follows, is a presentation of Costa Rican culture and national identity. The video shows Costa Rican cultural features: traditional clothing, Costa Rican food, bullfighting, the national flag, Costa Rican art, and the national theatre amongst other things. In the background, a voice is saying: "I am a unique, happy and caring nation that expresses itself through the diversity of its cultures. I am cradle of human talent, proud people who embrace challenges. I am a nation governed in peace with a solid long-standing democracy. I stand behind health, education, and the pursuit of self-development

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<sup>2</sup> The Esencial Costa Rica video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pNTirQ9eoLo>

as the cornerstones of happiness. In my essence lay the preservation and care for the environment. A model to the world.” This captures the essence of the Costa Rican nation and more importantly, the essence of its national identity. This part of the video does not only show the country’s cultural attractions, it also illustrates to tourists how harmonious the country is. The rest of the video is focused on the industrial side of Costa Rica. It seems more focused on attracting business than on attracting tourists. This video is showing that Costa Rica is a multisectoral country and is trying its best to attract tourism, and to increase its exports and investment.

Even with all this promotion, some people do not necessarily think it is the best way to promote Costa Rica. During my research in Costa Rica, 35 international tourists from many different countries all over the world, have filled in a survey (see Appendix 2). Amongst these tourists, the general consensus was that the brand Esencial Costa Rica is not the best way to promote the country’s external image. The same goes for Ticos, as they are quite critical of the brand. Entrepreneurs have a more favourable image of Esencial Costa Rica, because they can likely benefit the most from its brand, while Costa Ricans are generally not very interested. Although putting effort in marketing the brand to Costa Ricans, there is still a good chance that they still remain uninterested (V. Calderón, personal communication, Dec. 16, 2019). Both Vanessa Calderón and Melissa Tencio agree on one point: it is up to the new generation to get to know and use the brand. The brand is quite new, and the ‘older’ generation does not know it and does not want to use it. But when more awareness is created, especially under young people, the new generation might be more open to it (V. Calderón, Dec. 16, 2019; M. Tencio, Jan. 24, 2020). For example, they might refer to Esencial Costa in conversations with people looking to visit Costa Rica. Oscar Perez, a nature tour guide in Monteverde, is not so sure about Esencial Costa Rica and argues that representatives of Esencial Costa Rica do not know what they are selling or what they are representing. In his opinion, the brand is not all bad, but he is not fond of its double moral: while it is representing the conservation of nature and sustainability in Costa Rica, it is also attracting more and more tourists who are detrimental to the same nature (O. Perez, personal communication, Dec. 4, 2019). He has a point: it will remain a challenge to keep a healthy balance between the number of tourists visiting the country and how much tourists the country can reasonably welcome without the risk of damaging its nature due to mass tourism.

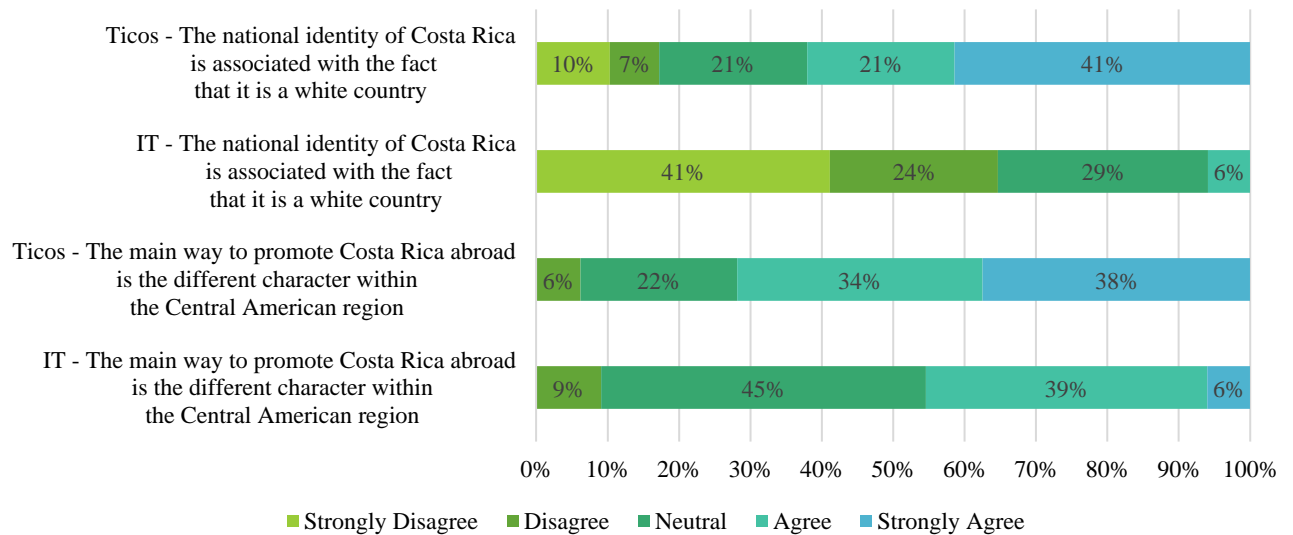


Fig. 2: Comparison of responses to two survey questions

### 3.3 National Identity as Costa Rica’s Nation Branding Strategy

Costa Rica is focusing its efforts on nation branding. It has established a country brand, which is promoted nationally and internationally. But it has not yet become completely clear what other strategies the country uses as part of its nation branding. In this section, it will be examined if Costa Rica is using its national identity as a nation branding strategy. Costa Rica’s national identity is based on the country’s long-standing, stable democracy, on the perception that the population is ‘whiter’ than their neighbouring countries, and on the feeling that it is different from other Central American countries. To analyse if Costa Rica’s national identity is indeed a nation branding strategy, it is important to examine the perception of tourists and Costa Ricans and to analyse Costa Rica’s online promotion.

To answer the question whether the national identity of Costa Rica is used as a nation branding strategy, it is necessary to look at research that I have collected in Costa Rica. During a research period in Costa Rica from November 2019 to January 2020, I have conducted surveys amongst international tourists as well as amongst Costa Ricans (see Appendix 2 and 3). A total of 35 international tourists filled in the survey, as well as 34 Costa Ricans. I have also interviewed people with knowledge of nation branding in Costa Rica: Vanessa Calderón, who is working for ICT, and Melissa Tencio, who is working for Esencial Costa Rica. Vanessa Calderón provided me with a presentation that is created and used by ICT and Esencial Costa Rica to

promote Costa Rica in several congresses, fairs, summits, and other events. She also showed me the official tourism website of Costa Rica as well as promotional videos created by Esencial Costa Rica. These surveys, interviews, and materials have been useful for studying nation branding strategies in Costa Rica.

One important part of Costa Rica's national identity is the country's peace and democracy. These two features are at times presented in the promotion of the country. In the section 'About Costa Rica' on the official tourism website, it is mentioned that it is one of the few countries in the world with no army and that both the country and the people have a peaceful mindset. This is highlighted to assure people that they are visiting a safe country, or as it is called on the website, "a safe paradise" (Visit Costa Rica 2020). In the YouTube video of Esencial Costa Rica, it is only briefly mentioned that it is a peaceful country with a long-standing democracy. In the presentation of Esencial Costa Rica, one of the reasons to visit Costa Rica is that it is a peaceful and educated country. It is explained that there is no army since 1948 and that education is now free and mandatory (V. Calderón, personal communication, Dec. 16, 2019).

As was mentioned in an earlier chapter, the national identity of Costa Rica is also based on its uniqueness, especially within the Central American region. The country perceives itself as different from other Central American countries, especially when it comes to politics and being more peaceful. This was not very clearly visible in the country's promotion, but it is still mentioned on the official tourism website. It is stated that "[u]nlike other countries, Costa Rica enjoys a very stable political climate and economic development" (Visit Costa Rica 2020). The sentence shows that the country is unique, because it has something that other countries do not have. Through the survey, Costa Ricans were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the sentence: "The main way to promote Costa Rica abroad is its different character within the Central American region" (see Appendix 2 and 3). Refer to Fig. 2 for a visualisation of the results. Many respondents strongly agreed. This does not only show that they think it is a good way to promote the country, it also shows that the people acknowledge the difference of the country. When the same statement was given to international tourists, the general consensus was neither agreement nor disagreement. As highlighting the uniqueness of Costa Rica is something to be proud of, it is not surprising that many Costa Ricans believe it is a favourable way to promote Costa Rica.

One of the aspects of the national identity of Costa Rica, the population's 'whiteness', is not visible. On the contrary, the country promotes itself as being a culturally diverse country. That

is mentioned in the Esencial Costa Rica video and on the website for tourists. On the website, it is stated that the country has many ethnic groups, colonies of immigrants, and indigenous groups. These groups have either been hidden or not recognised in society since the formation of the nation. The national image of Costa Rica existed of a 'white and homogenous' population. The country is now trying to change this image. As the examples of promotion show, Esencial Costa Rica's video for example, the diversity of cultures is promoted. It is also notable in the perception of the international tourists. The majority strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement: "The national identity of Costa Rica is associated with the fact that it is a white country". For them, this is not as obvious as it might be for Costa Ricans. Because for Ticos, it seems that there is still some sentiment of Costa Rica being a 'white' country. Costa Ricans were asked to agree or disagree with the statement, "The identity of Costa Rica being associated with being a white country", there were many people who agreed or strongly agreed. It might still be part of the national identity, but it is clearly not promoted.

Almost every respondent strongly agreed with the sentence "I am very proud of my national identity" and subsequently, there were also a lot of respondents who believed that the country should be promoted using the Costa Rican national identity. Even though Costa Ricans think this way, it is not a tool to promote Costa Rica, according to Melissa Tencio of Esencial Costa Rica. Perhaps, some elements of the national identity or of the Costa Rican culture are used, but not the national identity in itself (personal communication, Jan. 24, 2020). This is coherent with my research: only certain aspects are highlighted in the promotion of Costa Rica. The national identity of Costa Rica is not explicitly used as a nation branding strategy.

### **3.4 Ecotourism as Costa Rica's Nation Branding Strategy**

To follow up on the previous section, it is not only useful to look at Costa Rica's national identity as a possible nation branding strategy. Ecotourism has been a very important part of tourism in Costa Rica since the end of the twentieth century. The country was known as the number one ecotourism destination and it still provides many ecotourism projects. It is very interesting to see if ecotourism is a nation branding strategy in Costa Rica.

Tourism is very important in Costa Rica's nation branding. One of the goals of nation branding is the attraction of tourism. This is no different in Costa Rica, where tourism makes up a large percent of the country's income. Tourists usually look for certain attractions when they are



deciding upon a destination. According to surveys conducted by ICT (distributed in the international airports of San José and Liberia), tourists visiting Costa Rica are mostly looking for the sun and beach, ecotourism, adventure, and culture. There is only a small group of people looking for wellness and sports (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo 2018). But these attractions are offered in many different countries, not just in Costa Rica. Is there then something that makes Costa Rica more unique than all these other countries? Since the twentieth century, the country is known for its nature, its biodiversity, and its ecotourism. Even though there are other Central American countries that have the same or similar nature, Costa Rica has one comparative advantage: its nature is far more accessible (M. Tencio, personal communication, Jan. 24, 2020). In the promotion of the country, it also becomes clear how important nature is. Nature is to be found in every campaign, advertisement, and promotion.

The earlier mentioned examples of the promotion of *Esencial Costa Rica* show that nature is the most visible aspect (see Appendix 1). The official tourist information website shows the importance and promotion of nature (Visit Costa Rica 2020). The first slogan on the website is “Life’s Essentials Found Here” in green, botanical letters. Underneath it is stated: “The Costa Rica Essentials: Essential Costa Rica is about promoting organic ingredients, unspoiled nature and authentic experiences” (Visit Costa Rica 2020). Nature also played an important role in Costa Rica’s tourism campaigns. The *No Artificial Ingredients*-campaign was created to introduce people to Costa Rica’s nature and national parks. *Esencial Costa Rica* and *Only The Essentials*-campaign use nature in every promotion. They show elements, such as nature, sustainable development, and biodiversity. This image is also part of the perception of international tourists and Costa Ricans. Through the surveys, it became clear that both international tourists and Costa Ricans agree and strongly agree with the statement that foreign tourists associate Costa Rica with nature and ecology. They also very much agreed that tourism in Costa Rica is strongly associated with the beauty of its nature. That was in fact the statement with which more than 75% of both international tourists and Ticos strongly agreed. It is exceptionally clear that Costa Rica is associated and promoted with its nature, but biodiversity and sustainable development also seem to play a role.

It is evident that nature plays a significant role in the promotion of the country. However, even though nature is not equal to ecotourism, they are two intertwined concepts. Ecotourism is very important for the country and the conservation of nature. So, if nature is branded in every possible way, could ecotourism be branded and promoted as well? On the official website of

Visit Costa Rica, there is no mention of ecotourism whatsoever. There is only a dedicated section on sustainability. The top three activities that are shown on the front page, are wildlife, sun and beaches, and adventures (Visit Costa Rica 2020). And indeed, these are the activities that most international tourists choose to do when traveling to Costa Rica. The ICT surveys clarify that sun and beach activities are the most undertaken activities, followed by cultural activities (this is only true for international tourists who arrived at San José's airport), ecotourism, and adventure activities (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo 2018). In the surveys, it is obvious that ecotourism is just a category of attractions. David Madrigal and Oscar Perez, both naturalist guides in an ecological reserve in Monteverde, recognise this as well: ecotourism is an extra option for tourists. It is just a part of tourism (personal communication, Dec. 4, 2019).

Also, in other international promotion, there is no clear sign of ecotourism. The stands on travel fairs are made to look like Costa Rica's nature, but that does not make it ecotourism. In the 'Seven Reasons to Visit Costa Rica' presentation of ICT and Esencial Costa Rica, ecotourism is mentioned, but under the umbrella of 'Sustainable and Responsible Destination'. It is explained that Costa Rica is a pioneer of ecotourism, but continues to mainly focus on sustainability and the CST-programme (V. Calderón, personal communication, Dec. 16, 2019). This is also what Oscar Perez recognises: he explains that ICT focuses on campaigns that promote responsible tourism, sustainable tourism, and ecotourism; on campaigns that are much more concerned with the environment (O. Perez, personal communication, Dec. 4, 2019). Within the country, ecotourism was also not as visible. When one looks at the brochures of tourism companies in any of the tourism offices, there are not many that use the word ecotourism or 'eco', even though some of them are actually officially ecotourism projects. This is because these projects have existed for many years and there are not many incentives for them to change their name. It is not only a long and costly process; they also would lose their already built-up reputation (V. Calderón, personal communication, Dec. 16, 2019). However, there are also projects that actually use the prefix 'eco' while they are not ecological, as they do not have any certificate. The only way to recognise true ecotourism is to look for the certificate of the CST-programme or to look online on the CST website and see what businesses are listed. ICT is much more focused on ecotourism and on sustainability, through the CST-programme, so in that way ecotourism is used as a tool to promote tourism in Costa Rica, according to Oscar Perez (personal communication, Dec. 4, 2019).

Even though Costa Rica has sufficient certificated ecotourism projects, it does not seem like it is very much promoted. But how is ecotourism in the country then perceived? International tourists and Ticos strongly agreed that ecotourism is a hallmark of Costa Rica and that it is the main way to promote Costa Rica abroad. According to the general manager of ICT, ecotourism is both desired by the country and by the tourists: for Costa Rica, it is one of the attractions of the country, while it is good for the environment. For tourists, it is something tangible, something new, and something they believe it truly has a positive effect, and these reasons is why they want it (R.R. Chaves, personal communication, Jan. 24, 2020). International tourists acknowledge that Costa Rica has an excellent offer of ecotourism projects. Perhaps this is a result of the tourists coming to Costa Rica: they might already be interested in ecotourism and know therefore where to find it. Because when it was asked what the main characteristic of the public that is interested in ecotourism in Costa Rica was, the most given response of international tourists by far was ‘mainly people who are looking for natural beauties’. Other often given responses were ‘mainly people who are aware of environmental protection’ and ‘there is no specific profile’. Ticos responded the same in terms of people looking for natural beauties and who are aware of environmental protection, but they also acknowledged ‘mainly foreigners’ (see Appendix 2 and 3 for questions). As the surveys of ICT show, people from Europe are the most interested in ecotourism activities. People from the United States and Canada also undertake ecotourism activities, while people from Latin America are not as interested (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo 2018).

It seems that rather than just focusing on ecotourism, the country is more focused on sustainable tourism. The official tourism website, the presentation of ICT and Esencial Costa Rica, the opinions of people working in ecotourism, and the opinions of people working in the field of nation branding show that ecotourism is indeed a part of the country, a category in tourism, but not a tool for nation branding. According to Melissa Tencio, sustainability is the nation branding strategy, and ecotourism is a part of that (M. Tencio, personal communication, Jan. 24, 2020). So, Costa Rica might be more known as a sustainable destination. Ecotourism in itself might not be a nation branding strategy but instead, sustainability is.

In conclusion, Costa Rica’s nation branding started in the right way. The country had a clear goal in mind, created a nation brand, set up the right organisational structure for its nation brand, and was aware of its image. The creation of the nation brand Esencial Costa Rica was very important, as the brand is now a visible strategy of the country. It is promoted nationally

and internationally and shows that Costa Rica is a multisectoral country, not just a tourism destination. To nation brand Costa Rica, the country could have used certain nation branding strategies, such as its unique national identity and its ecotourism. This chapter has analysed if that is the case, but it became clear that Costa Rica's national identity and ecotourism are not explicitly used as nation branding strategies. As it turns out, nature, sustainability, and only certain aspects of Costa Rican culture and national identity are used in the country's nation branding. While the national identity and ecotourism are present in the country, they are not used as the main promotion for the country.

## Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to answer the following research question: Are national identity and ecotourism nation branding strategies of Costa Rica? The hypothesis of this thesis suggests that they are indeed used as nation branding strategies.

In the first place, it needs to be understood that national identity in Costa Rica is something very unique. It is a country known for being different than its Central American neighbours, due to its unique history. During its colonial period, the country was neglected by Spain. It therefore did not need to struggle for independence. Following its independence, the Costa Rican nation was quite peacefully formed. Eventually, it was decided to abolish its army and to install a democracy. These features have made Costa Rica into something quite unique: a Latin American country that has been relatively peaceful, not under any form of military dictatorship, and has had more than a century of democracy.

In the second place, the importance of ecotourism needs to be highlighted. It was particularly important in Costa Rica in the 1990s. The country was perceived as the poster child of ecotourism, and the number one destination for it. To promote this even further, a global tourism campaign was created by the Costa Rican Institute for Tourism. As this was too much focused on Costa Rica's nature and (eco)tourism, the country adopted nation branding strategies and the country brand Esencial Costa Rica was created. With this, more sectors of the country could be promoted.

As for Costa Rica's national identity, the research, expertise, and perceptions of international tourists and Ticos show that it was not explicitly used as a nation branding strategy. Certain elements of the national identity and of the Costa Rican culture are at times used in the country's nation branding. These include the long-standing democracy of Costa Rica and the country's peaceful mindset, as is often mentioned together with the abolition of the army. Even though it has been analysed that a part of the national identity is the sense that Costa Rica is a 'white' and non-indigenous country, the contrary is being promoted: Costa Rica as a culturally diverse country with the recognition of indigenous people. This shows that instead of using the national identity, Costa Rica is promoting mostly positive elements or even contradictory elements in its nation branding.

When it comes to ecotourism in Costa Rica, my analysis has shown that it is not an explicit nation branding strategy. It is evident that nature plays an important role in Costa Rica's nation branding, but ecotourism is not highlighted or used in the same way. It became clear that ecotourism is one form of tourism, just as adventure tourism, sun and beach tourism, and cultural tourism are forms of tourism. It is one of the many attractions Costa Rica has. It was also made clear that the most undertaken activities are sun and beach activities, followed by ecotourism activities. It is thus an important part of Costa Rica's tourism. Ecotourism is not only a form of tourism. It is also a subcategory of sustainable tourism. Sustainability is far more visible in the promotion of the country. It is one of the five values that *Esencial Costa Rica* represents and is therefore used in the promotion of the country brand as well as the country. The Costa Rican Institute of Tourism is also using sustainability over ecotourism. Their Certification of Sustainable Tourism-programme shows that they focus on sustainable tourism as key concept. Hence, one can conclude that sustainability is a nation branding strategy, whereas ecotourism is just a part of that. Sustainable tourism and sustainability are the umbrella terms for ecotourism, and ecotourism is therefore implicitly promoted.

Due to globalisation, the concepts of nation branding and national identity are increasingly more important. As the world has become a global market, countries need to compete with one another, especially in the sectors of tourism, exports, and investment. Nation branding can be used as a strategy in this competition. Besides that, as the world is becoming more homogenous, national identity is becoming more important in order to highlight one's differentiation, and one's uniqueness. But also due to globalisation, people have a lot of choice when it comes to travelling. As a subcategory of nation branding, countries can choose destination branding. An example of that is ecotourism, which can be used to attract tourists to a certain country. This thesis has provided research on these highly relevant concepts in the context of Costa Rica.

As the research shows, Costa Rica has been studied in the fields of ecotourism and national identity, but these concepts have not yet been connected to nation branding. The literature on Costa Rica's nation brand has focused primarily on the country brand *Esencial Costa Rica*, while other nation branding strategies are underexposed. This is not surprising, as Costa Rica's nation branding has not existed for a long time. This thesis has attempted to provide new research and could therefore serve as a base for future research.

Moreover, the perceptions of international tourists and Costa Ricans have also been understudied. Whereas ICT and other external companies research the perceptions, there is no study that reveals whether the nation branding strategies are aligned with the perception and feeling of the people. As this thesis with the example of 'white' vs. culturally diverse population has shown, the perception of Costa Ricans is not always aligned with what is promoted and leaves room for future research.

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## List of Appendices

### Appendix 1: Promotion of Esencial Costa Rica Abroad

The following photos are provided by Vanessa Calderón of the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism. These photos are examples of how Esencial Costa Rica is promoted abroad.



Figure 1: Esencial Costa Rica's electric vehicles that were transformed with elements of the Costa Rican biodiversity and now circulate in the cities of Lyon and Bordeaux promoting the sustainability of the destination.



Figure 2: The stand of Esencial Costa Rica on the international travel fair in Switzerland in 2019.



Figure 3: *Only the Essentials*-campaign on the metro of Chicago.



Figure 4: Promotion of Costa Rican forests in New York.

## Appendix 2: Survey for International Tourists

<b>SURVEY ABOUT ECOTOURISM IN COSTA RICA</b>							
<b>THE OPINION OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS</b>							
1. Survey number	2. Date	3. Country	4. Age	4. Gender			
				<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> Female			
5. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed? If you are currently enrolled, what is the highest degree obtained?							
<input type="checkbox"/> a. Incomplete elementary school <input type="checkbox"/> b. Full elementary school <input type="checkbox"/> c. Incomplete secondary school <input type="checkbox"/> d. Full elementary school <input type="checkbox"/> e. Non-university technical education		<input type="checkbox"/> f. Incomplete university education <input type="checkbox"/> g. University degree <input type="checkbox"/> h. Postgraduate (Master, Doctorate) <input type="checkbox"/> i. No schooling					
6. On a scale of 1 to 5; 1 being totally disagreeing and 5 being totally agreeing, how would you personally rate the following statements?							
			1	2	3	4	5
a. Costa Rica is an important international tourist destination							
b. Tourism in Costa Rica is strongly associated with the beauty of its nature							
c. The geographical beauty of Costa Rica is part of the national identity							
d. Foreign tourists associate Costa Rica with nature and ecology							
e. Ecotourism is a hallmark of Costa Rica							
f. Ecotourism is the main way to promote Costa Rica abroad							
g. The majority of Costa Ricans know what ecotourism means							
h. Ecotourism is not within the reach of common Costa Ricans							
i. The main way to promote Costa Rica abroad is the different character within the Central American region							
j. The national identity of Costa Rica is associated with the fact that it is a white country							
k. The brand 'Esencial Costa Rica' is the best way to promote the country's external image							
l. Foreign tourists look for the exotic landscape in Costa Rica							
m. Foreign tourists look for the exotic population of Costa Rica							
n. Costa Rica has an excellent offer of ecotourism projects							
o. The infrastructure and ecotourism services are of high quality in Costa Rica							
7. What has been your main reason for being interested in ecotourism? Choose only one option.							
<input type="checkbox"/> a. Leisure <input type="checkbox"/> b. Interest in preserving nature <input type="checkbox"/> c. To help local people and local businesses		<input type="checkbox"/> f. Out of curiosity <input type="checkbox"/> g. Because it is sustainable tourism <input type="checkbox"/> h. Interest in knowing the country better <input type="checkbox"/> i. Because it relates to my activity or profession					

<input type="checkbox"/> d. Because it is included in my holiday package <input type="checkbox"/> e. Because it is an alternative to mass tourism	<input type="checkbox"/> j. Because the price was convenient
8. What is in your opinion the main characteristic of the public that is interested in ecotourism in Costa Rica? Choose only one/two option(s).	
<input type="checkbox"/> a. Mainly foreigners <input type="checkbox"/> b. Mainly people with high incomes <input type="checkbox"/> c. Mainly people who are aware of environmental protection <input type="checkbox"/> d. Mainly people with a scientific interest	<input type="checkbox"/> e. Mainly people who are looking for natural beauties <input type="checkbox"/> f. Mainly people who try to escape mass tourism <input type="checkbox"/> g. There is no specific profile

## Appendix 3: Survey for Ticos

<b>ENCUESTA SOBRE ECOTURISMO EN COSTA RICA</b>						
<b>LA OPINIÓN DE LOS TICOS</b>						
1. Número de encuesta	2. Fecha	3. Edad	4. Sexo			
			<input type="checkbox"/> Hombre	<input type="checkbox"/> Otro		
			<input type="checkbox"/> Mujer			
5. ¿Cuál es el grado o nivel de educación más alto que ha completado? Si actualmente estudia, ¿cuál es el grado más alto obtenido?						
<input type="checkbox"/> a. Escuela primaria incompleta		<input type="checkbox"/> f. Enseñanza universitaria incompleta				
<input type="checkbox"/> b. Escuela primaria completa		<input type="checkbox"/> g. Titulación universitaria				
<input type="checkbox"/> c. Enseñanza secundaria incompleta		<input type="checkbox"/> h. Postgrado universitario (master, doctorado)				
<input type="checkbox"/> d. Enseñanza secundaria completa		<input type="checkbox"/> i. Sin escolarización				
<input type="checkbox"/> e. Enseñanza técnica no universitaria						
6. En una escala de 1 a 5, donde 1 representa la opción <u>totalmente en desacuerdo</u> y 5, la opción <u>totalmente de acuerdo</u> , ¿cómo valora usted personalmente las siguientes afirmaciones?						
		1	2	3	4	5
a. Costa Rica es un importante destino turístico a nivel internacional						
b. El turismo en Costa Rica está fuertemente asociado a la belleza de su naturaleza						
c. La belleza geográfica de Costa Rica es parte de su identidad nacional						
d. Los turistas extranjeros asocian Costa Rica con la naturaleza y la ecología						
e. El turismo ecológico es un sello de identidad de Costa Rica						
f. El turismo ecológico es la principal manera de promocionar Costa Rica en el extranjero						
g. La mayor parte de los costarricenses sabe lo que significa el ecoturismo						
h. El ecoturismo no está al alcance de los costarricenses comunes						
i. La identidad nacional tica no tiene nada que ver con el ecoturismo						
j. La principal manera de promocionar Costa Rica hacia el extranjero es su carácter diferente dentro de la región centroamericana						
k. La identidad de Costa Rica está asociada a que es un país blanco						
l. 'Esencial Costa Rica' es la mejor manera de promover la imagen exterior del país						
m. Los turistas extranjeros buscan en Costa Rica lo exótico de su paisaje						
n. Los turistas extranjeros buscan en Costa Rica lo exótico de su población						
o. Estoy muy orgulloso/a de mi identidad nacional						
p. El ecoturismo es parte de la identidad nacional costarricense						
q. El país Costa Rica debería promocionarse utilizando el ecoturismo						
r. El país Costa Rica debería promocionarse utilizando de la identidad nacional costarricense						



8. ¿Cuál es en su opinión la principal característica del público que se interesa por el ecoturismo en Costa Rica Marque sólo una opción/dos opciones.

- a. Principalmente extranjeros
- b. Principalmente personas con altos ingresos
- c. Principalmente personas concienciadas con la protección del medioambiente
- d. Principalmente personas con un interés científico

- e. Principalmente personas que buscan las bellezas naturales
- f. Principalmente personas que escapan del turismo de masa
- g. No hay un perfil específico