

Southern Costa Rica: Nature & Birding With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures

March 10 – 20, 2018

866.900.1146

800.426.7781

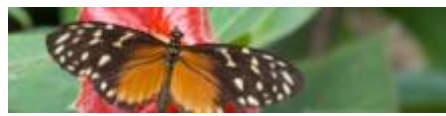
520.558.1146

naturalistjourneys@gmail.com

www.naturalistjourneys.com

or find us on Facebook at

Naturalist Journeys, LLC



"Our guide was everything you promised — we felt very lucky to have him as our guide. He was so good-humored and well-informed ... and clearly cares a great deal about — and is very proud of — his country."

— Angela Burnett

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Few places rival Costa Rica's ecological diversity. Over a quarter of the country is a national park, wildlife refuge, biological reserve, or protected area. And for good reason: Costa Rica boasts 850 bird species, 208 mammal species, 50,000 insect species, and 2,000 orchids. Wow!

On this Costa Rica nature tour, we spend several days at each location to get to know them in detail. We also visit an outstanding botanical garden and, whenever possible, local markets. Share in Costa Rican customs and sample local foods while you experience our hosts' exceptional hospitality. A real highlight is a visit to ornithological writer Dr. Alexander Skutch's farm. Enjoy a special getaway while you experience the marvels of the Central American tropics.

Tour Highlights

- Enjoy beautiful, birdy gardens right at our hotel in San José
- Search for the stunning Resplendent Quetzal in the beautiful Savegre River Valley
- Visit the farm of the late tropical nature author, Alexander Skutch
- Spend three stunning nights at the Wilson Botanical Gardens
- Hike the lush forest trails at Piedras Blancas and Carara National Parks
- Walk among the birds as you traverse the canopy-level Sky Walk

Tour Summary

11-Day / 10-Night Southern Costa Rica Nature & Birding Tour with Johan Fernandez & Michael Marsden

\$2995 from San José, Costa Rica

Airport is Juan Santamaria (SJO)



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Itinerary

Sat., Mar. 10 Arrival in San José

Welcome to Costa Rica! Arrive in San José where you are met at the airport for the transfer to our hotel. Enjoy this boutique hotel's spacious rooms, friendly service, and lovely bird-rich gardens! The beautiful capital city of San José is located in the central highlands with panoramic views of mountains and some truly lovely gardens. You may wish to arrive early to explore the city — past travelers have enjoyed the Gold Museum, the National Museum, and adjacent market area. We can help with arrangements if you choose to arrive early.

Accommodations at Bougainvillea Hotel or similar, San José (D)

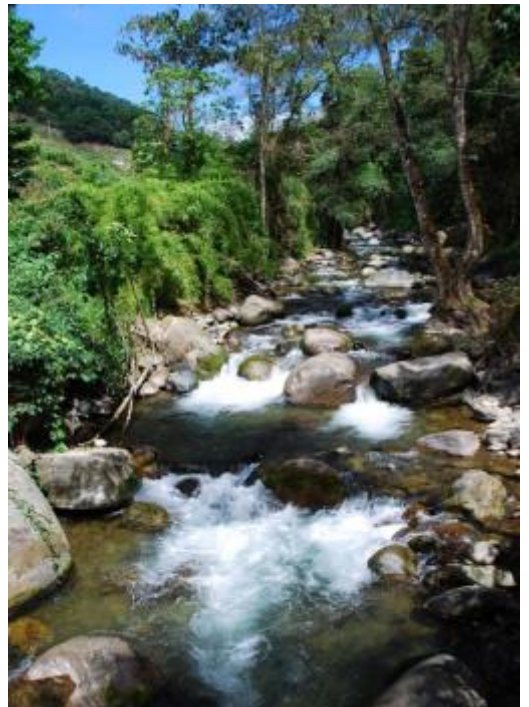
Sun., Mar. 11 San José / Mirador Quetzales / Suria Lodge in the Savegre Valley

After a delightful breakfast, and some birding in the hotel garden, we drive south on the Pan-American Highway towards the Talamanca Mountains, the backbone of southern Costa Rica. We stop in Cartago for a look at the lovely cathedral, then it's a beautiful drive up into the mountains, where we stop at the family-run cloud forest reserve, Mirador Quetzales. Here we enjoy lunch and a chance to walk lush forest trails in search of Costa Rica's most famous and elegant bird, the Resplendent Quetzal.

Our destination today, just 51 miles from San José, is the Rio Savegre Valley, which sits at a cool 7,000 feet. En route, we pass over the Cerro de la Muerte (Mountain of Death). This 11,000-foot peak was named for early explorers who, traveling on foot, died of hunger, exposure, and storms while crossing. Although we may encounter some rain and fog, we soon rise above the clouds to a realm of flower-filled fields, hillside farms, and fantastic views. We make a few stops for photographs and to see what's in bloom.

The Savegre Valley is home to several family farms and three nature lodges, which boast beautiful grounds traversed by a clear river. Our hotel is the third in the chain, and in a prime area for Resplendent Quetzal. After settling into our accommodations, we walk the lodge's trails, learning about the flora and fauna of the tropical cloud forest. With luck, we spot the colorful beauty of the Resplendent Quetzal, the holy bird of the Mayans. Enjoy dinner tonight at the lodge's restaurant.

Accommodations at the Suria Lodge in the Savegre Valley, San Gerardo de Dota (B,L,D)



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Mon., Mar. 12 The Savegre Valley / Resplendent Quetzal / Rio Savegre

Today our guides lead us along the clear mountain stream known as the Rio Savegre. Birding here is a treat, with so many colorful species: Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Long-tailed Silky Flycatcher, Collared Redstart, Blue-throated Toucanet, and Flame-colored Tanager, to name a few. We have the day to explore this isolated and beautiful valley, where we hope to find several pairs of Resplendent Quetzal feeding on wild avocado trees. If you'd like a more rigorous hike up the valley's ridgeline, we feature that in the afternoon. Optional horseback riding can be arranged, too. Meals at the lodge include a number of locally grown fruits and vegetables — the whole experience here is marvelous!

The Resplendent Quetzal is found here year-round, as is an incredibly diverse array of flora and fauna. On trails that wind past rivers and lakes, we look for Collared Trogon, Blue-throated Toucanet, Crowned Wren Thrush, Large-footed Finch, Sooty Robin, and American Dipper, as well as endemic species like Silky Flycatcher, Emerald Hummingbird, Cerise-throated Hummingbird, and Peg-billed Finch.

Montane oak forest dominates, and includes magnificent oaks like the Wild Brazilleto, Winter's Bark Tree, and Cipresillo. We take a stab at identifying them, then simply admire the hundreds of species of bromeliads, lichens, mosses, and ferns, and the multitude of orchids and colorful flowers. Locals raise fruit on the hillsides and farm trout in small ponds; enjoy meals at the lodge made with a host of homegrown foods.

Accommodations at the Suria Lodge in the Savegre Valley, San Gerardo de Dota (B,L,D)

Tues., Mar. 13

Cerro de la Muerte National Park / Skutch Farm / Wilson Botanical Gardens

Today we continue south, down the backbone of the Talamancas Mountains, along the Pan-American Highway to explore the southern part of the country. Much of the route is along the Continental Divide. While the drive takes much of the day, the scenery is exceptional. Vegetation at the highest point is dwarfed due to elevation, winds,



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and seasonal cold weather. We stop to enjoy a local coffee shop for artisanal crafts and delicious fresh coffee; a host of colorful birds come in to feed, too!

Just outside San Isidro, we visit the farm of the late Alexander Skutch, a famous tropical nature author. While Dr. Skutch and his wife have recently passed away, the farm has been dedicated as a private reserve in perpetuity. Here we enjoy our picnic lunch and take a short walk before heading further south to our accommodations for the next three nights at the renowned Wilson Botanical Gardens.



We arrive in time to settle before dinner. Each room has its own porch overlooking the rainforest. Enjoy a wonderful meal of fresh local foods served family-style at the research station. You are encouraged to mingle with the students, scientists, and other guests during our stay. Accommodations are designed with sunlit spaces, hardwood floors, and bamboo furniture in a relaxed atmosphere. Our tourist fees help support the research and conservation work of the station.

Accommodations at the Wilson Botanical Gardens (B,L,D)



Wed., Mar. 14 Wilson Botanical Gardens / Las Cruces Biological Station

Wake to the wonderful dawn chorus of birds singing at Wilson Botanical Gardens, located near the Panama border outside the town of San Vito.

Today we immerse ourselves in the beauty and diversity of mid-elevation rainforest and gardens, a naturalist's dream. Founded in 1962, the gardens are framed by the high peaks of La Amistad National Park (part of an international biosphere reserve shared with neighboring Panama). In a cool, lush mountain setting, the gardens host tropical and montane plants from around the world, and birds and wildlife are attracted to the colorful blossoms and fruits. Feeders attract Silver-throated Tanager and flowering hedgerows sometimes draw Snowcap Hummingbird.

Impressed by the ecological diversity of this valley, the Organization of Tropical Studies, a consortium of universities from both Costa Rica and the United States, bought the property to establish Las Cruces Biological Station, a scientific research center. Twenty-two acres exhibit numerous orchids, palms, heliconias, bamboos, and more. Twenty-four species of hummingbirds have been seen on the grounds and in the nearby San Joaquin Marsh, as have 350 species of birds, including the

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brightly colored Fiery-billed Aracari and the delightfully tame Blue-crowned Motmot. Coatimundi, intriguing relatives of the raccoon, are often found on the trails.

Accommodations at the Wilson Botanical Gardens (B,L,D)

Thurs., Mar. 15

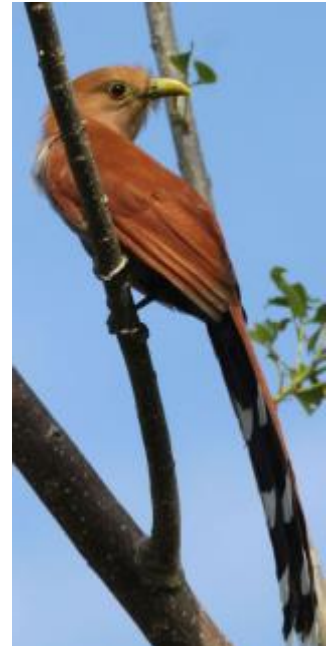
Mixed Flocks & Migrants at Wilson Botanical Gardens / San Vito

We enjoy another morning to bird, photograph, and walk the trails of Wilson Botanical Gardens. We find mixed flocks and study their dynamics. A mix of migrants are ready to head north — their bright breeding plumage is a thrill. Blackburnian Warbler are common here. It's also a great place to learn more about tropical plants and if there is interest within the group, we organize a garden tour.

After lunch, we venture into the town of San Vito, where Italian immigrants settled in the 1950s. The town is perched on the ridge of a mountain, and we stop to have a look around. We make sure to sample the local ice cream that comes in delicious tropical flavors.

Bird-viewing from the large porch by our lodging's dining area is a thrill; enjoy this or a walk before sunset.

Accommodations at the Wilson Botanical Gardens (B,L,D)



Fri., Mar. 16 Golfito / Esquinas Rainforest Lodge

This morning we travel to the lovely coastal town of Golfito, where the mountains reach the sea. Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant before heading to Las Esquinas Rainforest Lodge, our accommodations for the next two nights, adjacent to Piedras Blancas National Park.

The idyllic lodge is an ecotourism project that supports the local community. Lush gardens surround our thatched-roof cabins and verandas, as well as a swimming pool fed by a natural stream. You may not want to stray from the spacious porch that surrounds the main building of the lodge — with the rainforest at arm's length, it's an excellent place to enjoy passive birdwatching! However, the calls of trogons and Scarlet Macaw do lure you onto one of the many trails into the rainforest.

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Lowland Pacific Rainforest dominates here, offering diverse and exciting species. We hope to find the endemic Ant Tanager, several species of colorful trogons, Squirrel Cuckoo, secretive Antbird, and mixed flocks that include Golden-hooded Tanager and Green Honeycreeper. Mammals are always secretive, but this is a good spot for both Collared Peccary and the much larger Tapir. Several species of monkey live here, and wilderness-loving species like the King Vulture and the Black Hawk-eagle survey you from above.

Accommodations at Las Esquinas Rainforest Lodge (B,L,D)

Sat., Mar. 17

Las Esquinas / Piedras Blancas National Park

The sounds of myriad birds awaken you at dawn. Enjoy a leisurely morning in your cabin, or opt for an early walk during the height of bird activity. We meet for a delicious breakfast in the open-air dining room. It's hard to concentrate on food when hummingbirds are feeding young and tanagers come in to feed on fresh fruit at the feeders!

We then enjoy a full day on the lush grounds and adjacent parklands of lowland Pacific rain forest. After breakfast we venture out into the forest on trails that extend into Piedras Blancas National Park. The trail invites us to a scenic ridge above the Lodge. After lunch, relax or enjoy a swim. Or, visit the neighboring research center to talk to some of the resident biologists. In a wetland pond we look for White-throated Crake and Pygmy Kingfisher.

In the afternoon we drive out into the farmlands of the valley. Framed by mountains, this beautiful setting offers a glimpse of how people live in the Costa Rican countryside. Both Crested and Yellow-headed Caracara fly overhead; three species (or more!) of kingfisher call from their perches. We also hope to find more southern species, such as Red-breasted Blackbird and a variety of seedeaters. In the evening we listen to night sounds in the forest and get a well-deserved rest.

Accommodations at Las Esquinas Rainforest Lodge (B,L,D)

Sun., Mar. 18 North to the Pacific Coast / Villa Lapas / Sky Way Birding / Scarlet Macaw

After breakfast, we spend much of the morning in transit, making a loop back along the West Coast of the country, bound for a fabulous birding area known for Scarlet Macaw. We reach our lodge in time to settle in, and enjoy nature from above! Enjoy views and birding from the Sky Way, a series of five suspended bridges that allow us to admire the biodiversity of the area from a different perspective. If that is not a comfortable experience for you, it's also lovely to walk and bird from the hotel with your feet planted firmly on the ground!



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We spend the late-afternoon viewing the Tarcoles River and associated wetlands from a bridge, or perhaps on a boat outing among the mangroves. This is the best place in Costa Rica to watch for Scarlet Macaw returning to roost sites. Their calls alert us and as we wait to see their dazzling colors, we find a host of other species such as Mealy Parrot and noisy Rufous-naped Wren.

Accommodations at Villa Lapas (B,L,D)

Mon., Mar. 19 Carara National Park / Return to San José

We start early for a great morning of birding at Carara National Park, where we witness the diversity of birds and fauna in this transition forest. Here we walk the trails and search for birds, butterflies, and mammals. This is the northern reach of species at home in Pacific Rainforest, and the southern reach for those associated with Pacific Dry Forests — this park's diversity is unparalleled.

The open nature of Carara's transition forests lends to finding birds. It's also an excellent place to observe an army-ant swarm and its attendant antbirds. We may also find Scaly-breasted Hummingbird or Blue-throated Goldentail. Orange-collared Manakin, Black-hooded Antshrike, Dot-winged Antwren, Dusky Antbird, and Chestnut-backed Antbird are more secretive species to find.

Accommodations at Bougainvillea Hotel (B,L,D)

Tues., Mar. 20 Departures

After breakfast we offer a group transfer to Juan Santamaria International Airport. Keep in mind that you should be at the airport almost three hours ahead of your flight, so watch those early morning departures! If you must leave early we can arrange a private transfer (small additional cost), shared with others if they are also leaving early. Otherwise, we suggest you plan flights out after 10:00 AM. (B)



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Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Please note, starting in January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey, \$2995 DBL / \$3450 SGL from San José, Costa Rica, is based on double occupancy and includes: airport transfers, accommodations for 10 nights, meals as specified in the itinerary, professional guide services, local guides, local park and reserve entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. It does not include roundtrip airfare to or from San José, or items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, or gratuities for portage or personal services. With fewer than six participants, a small group surcharge (typically \$100 – \$300 per participant) may apply.

Travel Information

Plan to arrive in San José on March 10, ideally between 2:00 and 5:00 PM if you wish to join the welcome dinner. If you arrive later, we can arrange the airport pickup and a snack for you at the hotel, or you may eat on the plane. You may want to arrive a day or two early (at your own cost) to take in the sights of the city. We suggest you plan departures for after 10:00 AM on March 20, though earlier or later flights can be accommodated.

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Photo Credits

Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Greg Smith (GS); Butterfly, GS; Collared Aracari, GS; Magnificent Hummingbird, Sandy Sorkin (SS); Resplendent Quetzal, GS; Montezuma Oropendola, GS; Iguana, SS; Red-eyed Tree Frog, GS; Blue-jeans Frog, SS; Bromeliads x2, GS; Bougainvillea Hotel, courtesy the hotel; Butterfly, SS; Savegre Valley, Willy Alfaro; Resplendent Quetzal, GS; Long-tailed Silky Flycatcher, GS; Ox Cart Art, Peg Abbott (PA); Morning Coffee, SS; Blue-crowned Motmot, Bob Behrstock; Blackburnian Warbler, Tom Dove; Green Honeycreeper, SS; Squirrel Cuckoo, PA; Golden-hooded Tanager, PA; Gray-cowled Wood-rail, SS; Crested Caracara, Alex Vargo; Swing Bridge, PA; Scarlet Macaw, GS; Speckled Tanager, GS; Silver-throated Tanager, GS; Costa Rica Group, GS.

