

# Costa Rica Wildlife & Birding

## Monteverde, Celeste Mountain & Caño Negro

with Naturalist Journeys



**March 20 – 30, 2024**

**La Selva/Sarapiquí Extension**

**March 29 – April 1**

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Naturalist Journeys, LLC



Few places rival Costa Rica's ecological diversity. Over a quarter of the country is protected lands, boasting 850 bird species and 200+ mammals.

Explore the lush Monteverde cloudforest in search of the dazzling Resplendent Quetzal, lovely Long-tailed Manakin, and bizarre Three-wattled Bellbird. Immerse yourself in tropical wonder at Celeste Mountain Lodge in the shadow of the Tenorio and Miravalles Volcanoes. Discover the Caño Negro area, rich in colorful waders like Roseate Spoonbill and Purple Gallinule, and perhaps even Jabiru; here you can opt for an after dinner drive to search for night birds and with great luck, large and rare mammals.

Choose an optional extension to explore legendary lowland rainforest on the Caribbean side at Costa Rica's famous La Selva Biological Station and Sarapiquí area—a great way to further immerse yourself in Costa Rica's stunning biodiversity and observe an entirely different subset of birds and other wildlife.

## Tour Highlights

- ✓ Relax at the beautiful Hotel Bougainvillea on arrival; bird their 10-acre award winning botanical garden
- ✓ Visit famous Carara National Park to see stunning Scarlet Macaw
- ✓ Search for hummingbirds, trogons, and mammals, too, from Monteverde Mountain Lodge, nestled in lush cloud forest
- ✓ Explore the Santa Elena Cloud Forest Reserve in search of Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Collared Redstart, and Azure-hooded Jay
- ✓ Relax at Celeste Mountain Lodge, featuring seasonal French cuisine and spectacular views of Caribbean foothill rainforest
- ✓ Search for uncommon and colorful denizens at Celeste such as the toy-like Tody Motmot and Rufous-winged Tanager
- ✓ Walk Tenorino National Park in search of tropical butterflies and perhaps even an army ant swarm (attended by antbirds!)
- ✓ Opt for a night drive to search for Black-and-white, Striped, and Mottled Owls, as well as Great and Northern Potoo, at Cano Negro
- ✓ See Sungrebe, Russet-naped Wood-Rail, and Yellow-breasted Crake at Caño Negro
- ✓ Opt for an extension to La Selva Biological Research Station and the Sarapiquí River area, an area rich in both mammals and birds

## Tour Summary

10-Night / 11-Day Costa Rica Birding & Nature Tour

\$4590 DBL / \$5390 SGL, from San José

With La Selva/Sarapiquí Extension, \$TBD

Airport is Juan Santamaría International (SJO)

## Day-to-Day Itinerary

### Wed., Mar. 20 Arrivals in San Jose | Hotel Bougainvillea

Bienvenido a Costa Rica! Please plan to arrive today in San José by 5:00 PM so you can join our welcome dinner and orientation. You are met at the airport for a transfer to our hotel in the hills of the historic suburb of Heredia. The Bougainvillea hotel is a family-owned and operated hotel with a welcoming atmosphere; fresh-cut flowers from the 10-acre garden, and original paintings and sculptures by leading local artists adorn the interior.

Massive beamed ceilings, wood paneling, and a fireplace all contribute to the warm feeling of a country inn. And, there are always great birds to greet you as you stroll trails through the garden.

Tonight we gather to enjoy a welcome dinner and the chance to meet your guides and travel companions.  
*Accommodations at the Hotel Bougainvillea (D)*

### **Thurs., Mar. 21 Central Pacific Coast**

After leaving friends at the airport, our group continues on its way to the Central Pacific area, where we stay in a lovely valley with a rushing river, close to the Pacific Ocean. We arrive in time for lunch. The hotel and dining room sit aside a small river, and there is a steady stream of species coming in, including toucans and aracarís.

This afternoon we take a mangrove boat trip on the Tarcoles River. This is a great complement to our boat trip on the Sarapiquí, showing you two sides of the country. If time permits, especially if we have not seen macaws on our boat trip, we stop on a high bridge with expansive views. Though busy with traffic, 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, close-at-hand, noisy Rufous-naped Wren.

*Accommodations at Cerro Lodge or Macaw Lodge (B,L,D)*

### **Fri., Mar. 22 Carara National Park | Monteverde**

We start early for a great morning of birding at Carara National Park, where we witness the diversity of birds and fauna in this transitional 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 some of the highest in the entire Central American region.

The open nature of Carara's transitional forests lends itself well to finding birds that are normally difficult to observe elsewhere, such as Great Tinamou, Collared Forest-Falcon, and Streak-chested Antpitta. It's also an excellent place to observe an army ant swarm and its attendant antbirds, including sometimes secretive Black-hooded Antshrike, Bicolored Antbird, Dusky Antbird, and Chestnut-backed Antbird. We may also find Scaly-breasted Hummingbird or Blue-throated Goldentail.

By mid-morning activity slows down, and we depart for higher elevations in the mountains, a couple of hours away. We enjoy lunch en route. Monteverde is a treasured location in Costa Rica where many birders get their first feel for birding lush montane forests. Remote, Monteverde has retained its charm despite its popularity and is still an excellent place for birding. We stay three nights to access several reserves. Plus, we have great birding right outside our door on the lodge grounds!

Our hotel, the Monteverde Mountain Hotel, sits amongst 15-acres of private forest at 4,500 feet above sea level. This mountain hotel has cozy rooms set in nicely kept grounds and features hummingbird feeders in the veranda.

Late in the afternoon, we enjoy birding at the Children's Eternal Forest. This reserve was established with donated funds from children in 44 countries and is managed by a non-profit foundation. The property has a more open woodland than others in Monteverde due to a rain shadow effect. Long-tailed Manakin, often found in drier coastal forests, can be found here. We also hope to see Rufous-capped Warbler, Rufous-and-white Wren, and with some luck more elusive species like Northern Barred-Woodcreeper and Orange-billed Nightingale Thrush.



Watch for Swallow-tailed Kite on the move overhead in the late afternoon. Our dinner is well-prepared local Costa Rican food at the hotel.

*Accommodations at the Monteverde Mountain Hotel (B,L,D)*

### **Sat., Mar. 23 Monteverde Cloudforest Reserve | Curicancha Reserve**

This morning we visit the famous Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, one of the best places to find Resplendent Quetzal. March is their breeding season, making our quest for this beauty a bit easier. Other lush highland forest species include Black Guan, Gray-breasted Wood Wren, Black-faced Solitaire, and with luck Silvery-fronted Tapaculo. Monteverde is a great place to spy a mixed flock, with Spotted Barbtail, Buffy Tuftedcheek, and Ruddy Treerunner probing bromeliads and mossy tree limbs while Spangle-cheeked Tanager searching for fruit in the canopy. This place is a wonderland for botany fans.

This afternoon we visit Curicancha Reserve, a small reserve (200 acres) but a true gem. Here, we get another chance to see Resplendent Quetzal, alongside Three-wattled Bellbird, Collared Trogon, Gray-throated Leaf-tosser, and other species. At hummingbird feeders, we may add Purple-throated Mountain Gem, Green-crowned Brilliant, Violet Sabrewing, and Magenta-throated Woodstar. With luck we could find mammals, too: Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth, Mantled Howler Monkey, White-faced Capuchin, or Kinkajou.

*Accommodations at the Monteverde Mountain Hotel (B,L,D)*

### **Sun., Mar. 24 Santa Elena Cloud Forest Reserve**

This morning, we visit a reserve that is less well-known than Monteverde but has equally stunning and diverse forests. Encompassing approximately 730 acres, the Santa Elena Cloud Forest Reserve was established in 1992 through the combined initiatives of the Santa Elena Community High School and Canadian-based Youth Challenge International. During our time in this verdant reserve, we scan the moss-laden trees for regional endemics such as Collared Redstart, Black Guan, and Collared Trogon, while also paying close attention to the trail ahead of us for secretive ground-dwelling species such as Buff-fronted Quail-Dove and Black-breasted Wood-Quail. However, the true stars of this forest are the incomparably beautiful Resplendent Quetzal, a contender for most beautiful bird of the world, and the bizarre Three-wattled Bellbird, the source of a call that rings throughout the cloud forest during this time of the year.

Other species we hope to see include Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Prong-billed Barbet, Chestnut-capped Brushfinch, Costa Rican Warbler, and Golden-browed Chlorophonia. Be sure to watch for Orange-kneed Tarantula!

Best of all, in addition to trails, there are feeders, where Green Hermit, Green-crowned Brilliant, Purple-throated Mountain-gem, Magenta-throated Woodstar, Violet Sabrewing, Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, and Coppery-headed Emerald all put on a show.

Enjoy the afternoon to bird the hotel surroundings, or some may wish to see artisan shops in the town of Monteverde. Dinner tonight is at the lodge.

*Accommodations at the Monteverde Mountain Hotel (B,L,D)*

### **Mon., Mar. 25 Celeste Mountain Lodge | Tenorio & Miravalles Volcanoes**

We can spend the early morning hours birding at the lodge and vicinity before we descend to another delightful area of Costa Rica, based for two nights at Celeste Mountain Lodge. Located on the slopes of the Tenorio Volcano, the lodge is set within beautiful mid-elevation Caribbean rainforest reserves of Tenorio Volcano

National Park; this welcoming mountain lodge is an ideal base for the next two nights. Both Tenorio and Miravalles Volcanoes can be seen from the grounds, and the habitat here is inviting for many species.

Ecologically, the area is a mixing ground of Caribbean and Pacific influences that meet along the ridgeline. The lodge is in the heart of the Tenorio-Miravalles Biological Corridor, which provides biological linkage between Lake Nicaragua and the delta of the Tempisque River, one of Costa Rica's major waterways, in the south.

After we check in at our lodge and settle in, we enjoy some free time to relax and get familiar with the grounds. The architecture is modern, with lots of glass and a stunning view of the mountains. A parade of colorful tanagers, orioles, and woodpeckers visit the fruit feeders within view of the lodge restaurant! The lodge sits at 2400 feet, quite a bit lower than Monteverde so we have new species to find here, as well as a second chance at some more general mountain species. Of the specialties, some are elusive to find including Tody Motmot, White Hawk, Yellow-eared Toucanet, Great Curassow, Ocellated Antbird, Dull-mantled Antbird, Lattice-tailed Trogon—imagine!

They take their food very seriously here and dinner is a real treat, blending foods of the region into European cuisine.

*Accommodations at Celeste Mountain Lodge (B,L,D)*

## **Tues., Mar. 26 Tenorio National Park | Celeste Mountain Lodge**

Early birders can join our guides for birding in the garden, where Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Summer Tanager may join regional specialties like Snowcap and Violet-headed Hummingbird. While in the volcanos region, we explore primary rainforest where over 300 species of birds have been recorded. The closest village is Bijagua, which retains a rural charm and a tradition of cattle raising and agriculture.

Today we explore Tenorio National Park's system of trails looking for specialties like the toy-like Tody Motmot, Stripe-throated Hermit, and various *Heliconia* butterflies. While we bird this prime tract of forest, the calls of antbirds in the understory may alert us to an army ant swarm, giving us our best chance to see some truly special obligate ant-followers such as Ocellated and Bicolored Antbird.

The park is adjacent to our lodge, and while visiting we are on the lookout for some of the area specialties, including Purplish-backed Quail Dove, Brown-hooded Parrot, White-ruffed Manakin, Broad-billed Motmot, Slaty-tailed Trogon, and Rufous-winged Tanager. We may, with some luck, find the often secretive Black-throated Trogon.

As the day ends, enjoy birding from the lodge's balcony as sounds of night birds and darkness descend. Then, off to a delicious meal! There is also an optional night walk after dinner to look for the amazing Red-eyed Tree Frog and Masked Tree Frog.

*Accommodations at Celeste Mountain Lodge (B,L,D)*

## **Wed., Mar. 27 Caño Negro | Optional Night Tour**

Awaken to sounds of the forest. After breakfast, we pack up to have time to bird and explore as we drive to our next lodge. Farm fields invite new species and vistas of mountains and fertile fields invite a few photo stops. We have even seen Great Green Macaw on this route! We have our lunch en route.

We are bound for the Caño Negro area, where we settle into delightful lodgings at the lowest elevation of our tour. Our comfortable rooms have well-designed furniture, ceiling fans, and air conditioning. We arrive in time to watch colorful tanagers and parakeets at the feeders. Garden birds include Spot-breasted Wren, White-

tipped Dove, Yellow-throated Euphonia, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Orange-chinned Parakeet, and more. At dusk, watch the sky for Red-lored Parrot as they come in to roost.

Some may want to take a dip in the pool or just enjoy the grounds. Tonight, we enjoy international cuisine at the lodge's Jabiru restaurant. Named after one of the tallest flying bird in the Americas, this restaurant offers a charming atmosphere and great views of the gardens.

After dinner, we offer an optional night tour, where we search for owls (Black-and-white, Striped, and Mottled), two species of potoo (Great and Northern), and perhaps even a large mammal or two!

*Accommodations at Cano Negro Lodge (B,L,D)*

## **Thurs., Mar. 28 Caño Negro National Wildlife Refuge | Caño Negro**

Our lodge is located near the Caño Negro National Wildlife Refuge, one of the most important biological areas of the country and among the most important wetland areas in the world. It is an official Ramsar site, hosting a large area, almost 25,000 acres, replete with lagoons and extensive river habitat.

What might we find here? Several kingfishers hunt along the river—Ringed, Amazon, and Green are the species we're most likely to see. Particularly beautiful are the Bare-throated Tiger-Heron and the elusive Sungrebe; with luck we may also find roosting Boat-billed Heron. On tree limbs hanging over the water we watch for Black-collared Hawk and Snail Kite. Many describe this area as similar to the Florida Everglades—especially as we approach Lago Caño Negro, where we may find American Pygmy Kingfisher, Snowy Cotinga (wow!), and Bare-crowned Antbird, as well as Anhinga, Roseate Spoonbill, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Purple Gallinule, and large numbers of Snowy and Great Egrets. With luck we could find Yellow-breasted and Gray-breasted Crake.

A few (by name) remind us we are on the border of Nicaragua: Nicaraguan Seed-Finch, Nicaraguan Grackle, and Nicaraguan Slider-Turtle. In the forest margins, watch for Lineated Woodpecker, Scarlet-rumped Tanager, and Pied Puffbird.

In addition to birds, we may find Green Basilisk, Green Iguana, river turtles, Spectacled Caiman, American Crocodile, and more. One never knows what might be spotted here!

Our hotel has a lovely bar if you want to gather for cocktails, and the dinner menu features international cuisine. After dinner we will do our final wildlife tally for the main tour, as tomorrow our group will split, some going on to the Caribbean Lowlands for our extension and others returning to Hotel Bougainvillea. Celebrate a great trip and all the sightings highlights!

*Accommodations at Cano Negro Lodge (B,L,D)*

## **Fri., Mar. 29 Return to San José OR Join Our Extension to La Selva/Sarapiquí**

This morning early, we enjoy some last birding around the lodge grounds, feeders, and gardens. Then our flock disperses. Those on the extension depart soon after breakfast, with great birding planned along the way to Sarapiquí. For those not opting for the extension, departing from the main tour, it's time to head back to San José. En route we will enjoy a lovely waterfall garden with hummingbird feeders en route to San José and then time at the lovely DoubleTree by Hilton Cariari where you can pack for travels, relax, enjoy the gardens, and share a final dinner with travel companions.

*Main tour accommodations at Bougainvillea (B,L,D)*

## **Sat., Mar. 30 Departures**

You may leave at any time convenient for you today. Please remember an international flight it is recommended that you be at the airport 3 hours ahead, so the best departure time would be mid-to late morning and onward. (B)

## **La Selva Biological Station/Sarapiquí River Extension**

### **Fri., Mar. 29 Frog's Heaven | Selva Verde**

Add a blitz of biodiversity! We do encourage those with time to see more of the country by exploring the Caribbean side in the lush Sarapiquí area on our extension. It is a scenic drive, and we arrive late-afternoon. Along the way, we stop at Frog's Heaven, a fascinating garden for seeing both birds at close range, and technicolor poison dart frogs. We then enjoy the Selva Verde lodge grounds with our guide before dinner. *Extension Accommodations at Selva Verde (B,L,D)*

### **Sat., Mar. 30 La Selva Biological Station Sarapiquí River**

Those who haven't joined us on the extension depart at your leisure this morning; your transfer is included. (B)

Those who have joined the extension explore La Selva Biological Station this morning, one of the premier tropical research stations in the world. Trails wind between laboratories and researchers' residences, and then fan out to primary and secondary forests where nature abounds. Lowland rainforest is particularly diverse here; the property is located near the confluence of two major rivers: the Rio Puerto Viejo and the Sarapiquí. The reserve is nearly 4,000 acres and connects to a forest corridor that ascends through nearby Braulio Carrillo National Park, providing links to middle and higher elevations.

La Selva comprises 1,600 hectares (3,900 acres) of tropical wet forests and disturbed lands. Four major tropical life zones define the contiguous corridor now protecting a large portion of Costa Rica's biodiversity. Recorded here are more than half of Costa Rica's almost 900 species of birds, 1850 species of vascular plants, and a rich array of mammals, insects, reptiles, and amphibians. Each year, La Selva's Christmas Bird Count is among the highest in numbers.

On trails near the Sarapiquí River we hope to see the beautiful Agami Heron and perhaps an elusive Sungrebe. Some of the other elusive species we may find include Great Curassow, Great Tinamou, Great Potoo, and Semiplumbeous Hawk. We should see Crimson-collared and Golden-hooded Tanager, Rufous and Broad-billed Motmot, Black-cheeked and Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, immaculate Snowy Cotinga, and, high on thermals above, King Vulture. Pied Puffbird and Rufous-tailed Jacamar are sit-and-wait predators that dart from perches to capture large insects. Orange-billed Sparrow are sharply patterned denizens of the forest floor.

Butterfly enthusiasts, prepare to be amazed at all the species, including several large electric-blue Morphos. Central American Agouti, Collared Peccary, and White-nosed Coati are mammals we often find.

In the late afternoon, we venture out on the Sarapiquí River for a boat trip; late afternoon is a great time to find secretive birds like Sunbittern, Green Ibis, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, several kingfishers, herons, and egrets. Mealy and White-crowned Parrots make raucous noise overhead, joined by the smaller Olive-throated Parakeet. It's beautiful to be out on the water where the temperature is cooler and views of the wildlife bound to impress. *Accommodations at Selva Verde (B,L,D)*

### **Sun., Mar. 31 Cinchona Waterfalls & Hummingbirds | San José**

This morning we enjoy another full morning in the lush Caribbean lowlands of Sarapiquí. Birding spots abound, and we may also find tropical frogs such as Glass Frog or Poison Dart Frog

There are two routes that connect San José to Sarapiquí, and today we return to San José on the slower, more winding Vara Blanca route that has some pretty incredible scenery, and a waterfall to be remembered. A new Café de Colibris is open, the original one was devastated by an earthquake in 2009. At this roadside location, you can find up to ten species of hummingbird, including the lovely Green Thorntail—wow! We hope to also find Northern Emerald-Toucanet, and both Prong-billed and Red-headed Barbet. Buff-fronted Quail-Dove can often be seen wandering in the area below the feeders. The waterfall is situated across a massive drainage, an important biological corridor linking high mountain terrain with the Caribbean lowlands.

We watch for Bat Falcon, Squirrel Cuckoo, and Brown Jay, plus we have one more day to listen to the songs of Clay-colored Thrush and Rufous-collared Sparrow. We make a full field day of it today, arriving late-afternoon to our delightful lodgings at the Hotel Bougainvillea for a final dinner, with transfers out the following day.  
*Accommodations at the Hotel Bougainvillea (B,L,D)*

## Mon., April 1 Departures

Enjoy birding on the grounds and depart today at your leisure. We arrange transfers for you to meet your International flights. Remember that you must be at the airport at least three hours ahead of your flight, so flights after 10:00 or 11:00 AM make for a more comfortable way to end your vacation! (B)

## Tour Details

### Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

### Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey (main tour) is **\$TBD DBL / \$TBD SGL**, from San José, Costa Rica. Tour cost includes all accommodations, meals as specified in the itinerary, professional guide services, other park and program entrance fees and miscellaneous program expenses. Cost of the La Selva/Sarapiquí extension is **\$TBD DBL / \$TBD SGL**. Tour cost does not include: round-trip transportation from your home city to San José, optional activities, or items of a personal nature like laundry, telephone charges, maid gratuities, or beverages from the bar.

### Travel Information

**Arrival & Departure Airport:** Juan Santamaría International (SJO), San Jose, Costa Rica

**Arrival:** March 20, 2024. You may arrive at leisure; we suggest you arrive in the afternoon (not later than 5PM) to enjoy the gardens and welcome dinner.

**Departures:** March 30, 2024 for the main tour, April 1, 2024 for the extension. On both days, you may depart at your leisure but keep in mind that you need to be at the airport three hours ahead. We suggest you book flights after 10 AM.

**Travel Tips:** If your flight comes in late, we suggest you arrive early to rest up from your travels. Our hotel is relaxing with gardens and birds. We can book early nights for you with a transfer at our arrival hotel, the Hotel Bougainvillea, located in a residential area of the city. You may also book this on your own, but if you do make sure to book the transfer with your hotel, we do not provide that service independent of the hotel booking. If you think you would enjoy seeing downtown San Jose and the museums, cathedral is of interest, you can select a downtown hotel of your



choice that you book online or through a travel agent – if so please organize a taxi to return to the airport for pickup or taxi out to the Bougainvillea to enjoy its gardens on the tour start date. Past tour participants have enjoyed Hotel El Presidente and the historic Grano de Oro when choosing downtown for their early days.

**VISAS:** At this time, no Visas are required by Costa Rica for tourist visits of less than 90 days.

**Photo Credits:** Keel-billed Toucan, Doug Greenberg; Purple Gallinule, Carlos Sanchez; Red-eyed Tree Frog, Greg Smith (GS); Resplendent Quetzal, GS; Violet Sabrewing, Sandy Sorkin (SS); Sloth, Peg Abbott.

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