

Costa Rica's Wild Pacific Side

With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



February 1 – 10, 2021

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Few places rival Costa Rica's ecological diversity. Over a quarter of the country is protected lands, boasting 850 bird species and 200+ mammals. Costa Rica has remained at the top of our list for traveler satisfaction, with talented guides, superb nature lodges, and fabulous birds and mammals.

Join us to explore and sample the rich diversity of birds and other wildlife that make Costa Rica such a classic must for birdwatchers and general naturalists alike. Wonder at the geologic forces that created Costa Rica at Rincon de la Vieja, while also partaking in the pleasures of a spa and mud bath.

Explore 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. Drift along in a boat among towering mangrove trees in search of the endemic Mangrove Hummingbird and imposing American Crocodile. Visit the home of the late naturalist Alexander Skutch, while enjoying the ecological richness and busy fruit feeders of the property.

Itinerary

Mon., Feb. 1 Arrival in Liberia, Costa Rica

Welcome to Costa Rica! Today, you arrive in Liberia in the northwest of Costa Rica via Daniel Oduber International Airport. We have arranged three scheduled private transfers for participants to Borinquen Mountain Resort and Spa near Rincon de la Vieja National Park. Designed and created in 1999, this exclusive

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Learn about the volcanic geologic forces that lifted Costa Rica out of the sea and created the biological wonderland we see today
- ✓ Search for elusive yet charismatic species such as Lesser Ground-Cuckoo and Tody Motmot at Rincon de la Vieja National Park
- ✓ Opt for a night drive to search for Black-and-white, Striped, and Tropical Screech-Owl, as well as Great and Northern Potoos
- ✓ Explore the trails of Carara National Park, where the birds of the dry northwest and wet tropics occur together to create a major diversity hotspot
- ✓ Visit the farm of the late tropical nature author and naturalist, Alexander Skutch
- ✓ Unwind in an infinity pool on the southern Pacific Coast, where the lush mountains reach the sea

Tour Summary

10-Day / 9-Night Costa Rica Birding & Nature Tour w/ Steve Shunk

\$3990, from Liberia

Arrival airport is Daniel Oduber Quirós International Airport (LIR)

Departure airport is Juan Santamaría International Airport (SJO)



location offers private villas with a private deck or balcony. Thermal springs with hot pools, volcanic mud, and a natural steam room add to the relaxing atmosphere (and geologic interest!) to this retreat. Enjoy a welcome dinner at the hotel.

Accommodations at Borinquen Mountain Resort & Spa (D)

Tues., Feb. 2 Borinquen Mountain Resort & Spa

Spend the day birdwatching in the hotel premises. Borinquen lies in a transition zone between the wetter cloud forests of the mountains and seasonally dry forests of the Guanacaste lowlands, so an interesting mix of charismatic and striking species is possible on the lodge grounds. Some of these may include the garrulous White-throated Magpie-Jay, lively Long-tailed Manakin, and colorful Turquoise-browed Motmot. By scanning the treetops in the early mornings, we might also see Keel-billed Toucan, White-fronted Parrot, and Bright-rumped Attila.

We explore the grounds at a relaxed pace for wildlife, while also giving time to enjoy the other features of the lodge such as the hot pools, fumaroles, and spa.

Accommodations at Borinquen Mountain Resort & Spa (B,L,D)

Wed., Feb. 3 Rincon de la Vieja National Park

Today, we board a transport and head south to Hacienda Guachipelin, where we will do some fun horseback riding up to the entrance of Rincon de la Vieja National Park. Along the way, a lovely landscape will unfold before us of the rural Costa Rican countryside. Some of the more conspicuous birds that we may see include chattering flocks of Orange-fronted Parakeet, nesting colonies of Montezuma Oropendola, or even a Stripe-headed Sparrow belting out its song from a fencepost.

Established in 2015, the park itself encompasses a variety of habitats ranging from seasonally dry forest to wet cloud forest in the northwest of Costa Rica. Once we arrive at the entrance to the park, our guide will lead us along trails to observe birds and other wildlife. By looking up, we hope to see colorful feeding flocks with species such as Yellow-throated Euphonia and Red-legged Honeycreeper, family parties of Collared Aracari, or clumsy Crested Guan. More secretive species in the undergrowth include Tody Motmot and Lesser Ground-Cuckoo. After the hike, we will visit one waterfall, as well as take a refreshing swim in the pristine waters of a river. Lunch will be at a restaurant or a picnic lunch by the river. In the afternoon, we return to Borinquen Mountain Resort and Spa for a mud bath and relaxation.

Accommodations at Borinquen Mountain Resort & Spa (B,L,D)



Thurs., Feb. 4 Borinquen to Caño Negro

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 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 Caño Negro Natural Lodge (B,L,D)

Fri., Feb. 5 Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge

Our lodge is located in 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 on a boat trip? 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—the area is still wild enough to support populations of rare species such as Jaguar, Jabiru, and Giant Anteater!

Our hotel has a lovely bar if you want to gather for cocktails, and the dinner menu features international cuisine.
Accommodations at Caño Negro Natural Lodge (B,L,D)

Sat., Feb. 6 Caño Negro to Costa Rica's Pacific Side

After breakfast, we head to the Pacific side of the continental divide for a chance to see birds of a wildlife-rich mangrove area, and to visit one of Costa Rica's most famous bird reserves – Carara National Park. We have lunch at Villa Lapas, get settled, and then head out for a late-afternoon boat trip into mangrove habitat. What a great way to start the trip, with possible sightings of Muscovy Duck, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Boat-billed Heron, Roseate Spoonbill, Turquoise-browed Motmot, and the endemic Mangrove Hummingbird. Common Black Hawk feed on frogs and crabs, while Crested and Yellow-headed Caracara patrol above. There are some large American Crocodile here at the mouth of the Tárcoles River as well.

We enjoy dinner in a patio setting with large trees and a flowing river making for a memorable evening.
Accommodations at Villa Lapas Hotel (B,L,D)

Sun., Feb. 7 Carara National Park to Southern Pacific Coast

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 points south passing beachside towns such as Jaco and Dominical until we reach our hotel Cuna del Angel. Nestled in lush and verdant surroundings, this seaside lodge features balconies with beautiful views and an infinity pool.

Accommodations at Hotel Cuna del Angel (B,L,D)

Mon., Feb. 8 Skutch's Los Cusingos Bird Sanctuary

After an early morning breakfast at our seaside hotel, we then drive to nearby Los Cusingos Bird Sanctuary, a memorial preserve for one of the most famous naturalists in the American tropics: Alexander Skutch.

At Los Cusingos we can get lost in time and forget we are only a half hour from the bustling city and the agriculture of the El General Valley. The home site looks as if Alexander might return from one of his epic walks, full of stories and details of birds seen that day. This pioneer of natural history in Central America, most notably Costa Rica, chronicled the intimate life history of hundreds of species. He wrote numerous books, including the country's first formative field guide.

Skutch first came to Central American in the 1930s, working at a botanist for the United Fruit company. In 1941, he settled in Costa Rica. Over the next 40 years, he would author some 200 scientific papers and 40 books—using a simple typewriter from his desk in a rustic cabin with shuttered windows. He was readily interrupted by birds. He made a life with his sweet wife, Pamela. Our early Naturalist Journeys trips visited them, and we always made sure to take her favorite cookies. Dr. Skutch left us just eight days before his 100th birthday. His later writings were deeply philosophical.

Today, the farm is managed by the Tropical Science Center. It is a fabulous place to find mixed flocks of tanagers, and some secretive species like Eye-ringed Flatbill and Royal Flycatcher. A real treat is to see North American migrant warblers here on their winter home alongside resident warblers like the Buff-rumped Warbler. Long-billed Hermit feed in colorful heliconia flowers and walking near the river we may find beautiful Fasciated Tiger-Heron. The property is named for a real beauty here on the Pacific side of the Continental Divide: the Fiery-billed Aracari. It sits at an elevation of 2700 ft.

We return to our lodge after our visit to relax and enjoy the grounds of the hotel.

Accommodations at Hotel Cuna del Angel (B,L,D)

Tues., Feb. 9 Ballena Marine National Park

Today, we drive a little less than three miles southward to Ballena Marine National Park (*Ballena* translates as whale) as a safe area for humpback whale migration. A variety of birds of interest also utilize the protected area of the park, including many species of migratory shorebird: Black-bellied Plover, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Spotted Sandpiper, Willet, and more. Magnificent Frigatebird patrol in good numbers overhead,



while Brown Booby actively hunt for fish right off the coast. In addition to the seabirds, we might also come across a fruiting tree full of raucous and dramatic Scarlet Macaws. It is a relaxed pace day of birding and exploring in a landscape where sea, sand, and forest meet. Lunch will be at a restaurant in the nearby area. *Accommodations at Hotel Cuna del Angel (B,L,D)*

Wed., Feb. 10 Departures

After an early morning breakfast, we board our transport and drive northward to San Jose to catch international flights out of Juan Santamaría International Airport. *(B)*

Guide Steve Shunk



Your guide, Steve Shunk, has been teaching adults about birds and nature since 1992. Steve is a seasoned tour guide, with over 150 trips under his belt, mostly in the western and southern US, but also in Canada, Mexico, Honduras, Peru, the Caribbean, Malaysian Borneo, and Sicily. Steve is a patient, experienced educator with an infectious enthusiasm for all things in nature, and he strongly incorporates ecology and conservation messages in all the regions where we travel. Steve has visited Jamaica three times, scouting all our travel routes and birding locations. He was also a keynote speaker at the BirdsCaribbean 20th International Meeting in Jamaica in July 2015.

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive at Daniel Oduber Quirós International Airport (LIR) in time for a welcome dinner on February 1. Please book departure flights at your leisure from Juan Santamaría International Airport (SJO) in San Jose on February 10. Please contact our travel agent, Pam Davis of Willamette Travel for help booking flights: pamd@wittravel.com or 800-821-0401.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the Journey is \$3990 DBL / \$4835 SGL, based on double occupancy, per person.

The tour price includes airport transfers, 9 nights' accommodations, all meals as stated in the itinerary, professional guide services, park and preserve entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. Cost of the journey does not include airfare from your home to Liberia, Costa Rica, or items of a personal nature, such as alcoholic drinks from the bar, telephone, and local guide gratuities (at your discretion, we will give some guidelines).

Photo Credits

Common Potoo, Carlos Sanchez (CS); Blue-gray Tanager, CS; Mantled Howler Monkey, CS; Amazon Kingfisher, CS; Red-legged Honeycreeper, CS; Cuna Del Angel view, courtesy of cunadelangel.com; Sungrebe, CS; Borinquen Resort, courtesy of Borinquen; White-fronted Parrot, Robert Gallardo (RG); Bright-rumped Attila, Bud Ferguson; Hiking in Carara, Paul Roberts; American Pygmy Kingfisher, Tom Dove; Green Iguana, Terry Peterson; Cuna Del Angel Resort, courtesy of cunadelangel.com; Scarlet Macaws, Bob Hill.

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