

# Christmas in Costa Rica

## With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures

December 22 – 29, 2021

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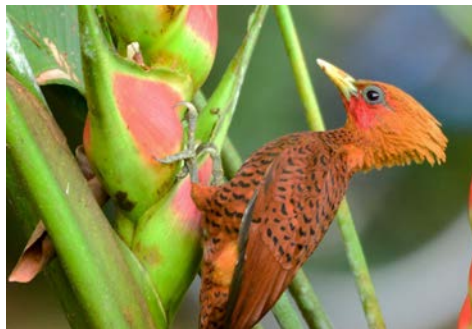
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Naturalist Journeys, LLC





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. Because of this rich diversity, Costa Rica has remained at the top of our list for traveler satisfaction, with talented guides, superb nature lodges, and fabulous birds and mammals.

This December, we invite you to celebrate the holiday season with us on an carefully-crafted weeklong tour. On this journey we traverse the Continental Divide, from lowland rainforest to cloud forest. Glide down a river looking for secretive birds such as Sunbittern and Green Ibis, several species of kingfisher, Green Iguana, and Mantled Howler Monkey. Relax at a mountain lodge and witness Northern Emerald-Toucanet and Collared Redstart in the wild Savegre Valley, a special place where Resplendent Quetzal nest and American Dipper feed in the rushing stream.

We spend several of our days on both the Caribbean and Pacific sides of the Continental Divide, with excellent field time in the highlands and lowlands. We feature two of our favorite lodges, and with three nights at each there's no need to rush. We can search for fabulous birds and mammals, have fun, taste local foods, and have time for photography if you like. We enjoy sharing in Costa Rican customs while we experience our hosts' exceptional hospitality.

### Tour Highlights

- Enjoy bright, birdy gardens right from our San José hotel
- Immerse in the stunning Savegre Valley, realm of the Resplendent Quetzal
- Cruise on a boat safari down the Sarapiquí River looking for Agami Heron and elusive Sunbittern
- Discover the La Selva Biological Station, one of the premier tropical research stations in the world
- Watch for fast-moving feeding flocks on Quebrada Gonzalez Trail in Braulio Carrillo National Park
- Ride the aerial tram at Tapirus Lodge to get eye level with wildlife—bring your camera!

### Tour Summary

8-Day / 7-Night Costa Rican Birding & Nature  
Tour w/ Bob Meinke  
\$2890, from San José  
Airport is Juan Santa María International (SJO)



## Itinerary



### **Wed., Dec. 22** Arrival in San José

After all this time, how about Christmas in Costa Rica! Get ready for a festive time as you land in San José where you are met at the airport for a private transfer to the Hotel Bougainvillea. We select this boutique hotel for its spacious rooms, friendly service, and spectacular birdy gardens, just outside the door. This is an eco-friendly hotel with a commitment to our planet and hospitality. Those arriving in time can enjoy a welcome dinner with fellow traveling companions and your guide. Those that arrive later than dinner have a snack tray on arrival. *Accommodations at Hotel Bougainvillea (D)*

### **Thurs., Dec. 23** Cerro de la Muerte | Cartago | Mirador Quetzales

Wake early for a walk and chance to bird the gardens, looking for Lesson's Motmot, White-eared Ground-Sparrow, and other species that thrive in our hotel's award winning tropical garden.

After breakfast we depart for the mountains, traveling up the Pan-American Highway to a scenic ridgeline known as the Cerro de la Muerte (Mountain of Death), part of the Talamanca Mountains. These 11,000 foot peaks were named for early explorers who, traveling on foot or by mule, risked dying of hunger, exposure, or storms.

As we reach the often cloud-enshrouded summit, we stop at the family-run cloud-forest reserve, Paraíso de Quetzales. Here we walk lush forest trails in search of Costa Rica's most famous and elegant bird, the Resplendent Quetzal, arguably the most beautiful bird in the Americas. Walking the cloud forest trails, we often find a host of other species as well. We then descend into the stunning valley of the Savegre River, a true realm of the Resplendent Quetzal!

Our lodge is situated at a cool 7,000 feet above sea level in an isolated and idyllic valley near the town of San Gerardo de Dota. As we descend into the valley we find a mix of pristine forest, hillside farms, and fantastic views. We stop for photographs and to see what's in bloom along the way.



Over forty years ago, Sr. Ephraim Chacon and his brother opened a road and began a dairy farm and apple orchard in this remote Talamanca Mountain valley. Today several lodges settle naturally into the landscape here, a prime destination for birders. After settling into our accommodations, we walk one of the lodge's nature trails, learning about the flora and fauna of the tropical cloud forest. We also learn about how these mountains, isolated over millenia, lead to the speciation of over forty bird species found nowhere else in the world. Some of these are delightfully common near the lodge, such as Black Guan, Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher, and Collared Redstart. We may also spot the normally shy Spotted Wood-Quail rooting around in the leaf litter behind the rooms. Enjoy a lovely meal tonight at the lodge's restaurant.

*Accommodations at Savegre Hotel, Natural Reserve and Spa (B,L,D)*

## **Fri., Dec. 24 Rio Savegre Valley | Montane Cloud Forests**

Enjoy delicious local coffee today while watching the feeding frenzy in action at the lodge's hummingbird feeders, with such avian jewels as White-throated Mountain-gem, Lesser Violetear, and Talamanca Hummingbird. After breakfast, we walk the local road where we get an excellent view of these beautiful Talamanca Range forests and their fantastic residents, like Flame-throated Warbler, Flame-colored Tanager, Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Sulphur-winged Parakeet, Yellow-winged Vireo, Wrenthrush, and Golden-browed Chlorophonia. Throughout the valley, various trails lead to waterfalls, secluded canyons, and mountain vistas; several options are available to us.

Resplendent Quetzal are found in this valley year-round, and we often spot them near a favorite fruiting tree where several males may congregate. On trails that wind past rivers and lakes, we look for Collared Trogon, Slate-throated Redstart, Large-footed Finch, and Sooty Thrush.

Montane oak forest dominates the area, including magnificent oaks like Wild Brazillito, Winter's Bark Tree, and Cipresillo. We take a stab at identifying them and then simply admire the hundreds of species of bromeliads, lichens, mosses, ferns, and the multitude of orchids and colorful flowers.

*Accommodations at Savegre Hotel, Natural Reserve and Spa (B,L,D)*

## **Sat., Dec. 25 Christmas at Savegre**

Today is Christmas day and we have a leisurely day planned. This is a family run business so we share in their local traditions. The hummingbird feeders are a favorite of our photographers, but small trails wind among the garden, and a quiet road traverses the valley. Birds are usually numerous around the gardens, with Stripe-tailed





Hummingbird, White-naped Brushfinch, Volcano Hummingbird, and Silver-throated Tanager among the usual visitors. With little to no driving we can be surrounded by beauty and birds on this special day.

Locals raise fruit on the hillsides and farm trout in small ponds. Walking the quiet road between our lodge and some neighboring ones, we may see several dozen species. Other locals have put out hummingbird and fruit feeders as well, one has a lovely patio and a commanding view of the valley. Enjoy coffee or have a piece of homemade bread while watching Acorn Woodpecker, Flame-colored Tanager, Mountain Thrush, and Fiery-throated Hummingbird attending the feeders.

Our full days here are a treat as you have time to really observe this bromeliad-clad realm in detail. For those that wish, a loop hike can be taken up and around a ridgeline above the lodge. The path is steep but you may be rewarded by an encounter with mixed flocks and some of the more elusive species. Or, choose to relax and let the birds come to you closer to our lovely hotel.

Drinks are on us tonight as we toast the holiday and time spent at one of our favorite lodges.  
*Accommodations at Savegre Hotel, Natural Reserve and Spa (B,L,D)*

## **Sun., Dec. 26 Waterfalls & Hummingbirds | Sarapiquí River Boat Tour**

We depart early this morning so we can make several birding stops along the way to our lodge on Costa Rica's Caribbean side. Our drive is very scenic, with a stop at the stunning the Mirador La Cascada at Cinchona; close to the viewpoint, a local coffee shop has hummingbird feeders set up with star-attractions being possible sightings of Green Thorntail and White-bellied Mountain-gem. In 2009, an earthquake heavily damaged this area. It has made a comeback with great close viewing of up to ten species of hummingbirds, possible Northern Emerald-Toucanet, and Prong-billed and Red-headed Barbets! Colorful tanagers include Scarlet-rumped, Silver-throated, and Crimson-collared. Comical Montezuma Oropendola may greet us here, or farther along our route today.

We reach our lodge in time for lunch. Afterwards, settle into your cabanas, each with a private porch, and enjoy some birding on the grounds ahead of dinner. Birds on the grounds may include Yellow-throated and Keel-billed Toucan, White-crowned and Red-lored Parrot, and Golden-hooded and Crimson-collared Tanager.

As the day cools off, we board boats on a quiet river to enjoy the Sarapiquí River. With the company of our local guide and boat captain, we enjoy a water safari outing quiet enough for viewing and photography. Our waterfront view gives us a great chance to find Green Iguana and Mantled Howler-Monkey. Along the river we



may find a good variety of herons and ibis, including Bare-throated Tiger-Heron and Green Ibis. Osprey are here—their whistled calls may remind you of home. On sandbars we search for Spotted Sandpiper, Northern Jacana, Amazon Kingfisher, and perhaps even a Sunbittern. Wintering Northern Waterthrush bob as they feed under shaded vegetation.

Return to this family-owned and operated hotel for a delightful dinner. The food is excellent and varied.  
*Accommodations at La Quinta Sarapiquí Lodge (B,L,D)*

## **Mon., Dec. 27 La Selva Biological Station**

The La Selva Biological Station is 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, as 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 up 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 possibly Snowy Cotinga. We should see Crimson-collared and Golden-hooded Tanager, Rufous and Broad-billed Motmot, Black-cheeked Woodpecker and Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, beautiful Black-throated Trogon, 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 crisply plumaged denizens of the forest floor.

Butterfly enthusiasts, prepare to be amazed at all the species, including several large electric-blue Morphos. Central American Agouti and White-nosed Coati are mammals we often find, and maybe even Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth.



In the late afternoon, we venture out to explore the area for some further birding – perhaps to a local orchid garden. Wet fields near Sarapiquí often hold a variety of open country birds that are very active in the late afternoon with species such as Roadside and Gray Hawk, Northern Jacana and Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Olive-crowned Yellowthroat and Thick-billed Seed-Finch all possible.

*Accommodations at La Quinta Sarapiquí Lodge (B,L,D)*

## **Tues., Dec. 28 Braulio Carrillo National Park**

We depart early this morning for Braulio Carrillo National Park, where views of the rain forest are incredible. Although there are few trails in this massive park, the Quebrada Gonzalez Trail is a decidedly rich and productive one. Fast-moving feeding flocks, often led by Black-faced Grosbeak, can contain a host of striking and local species such as Streak-crowned Antvireo, Black-and-yellow Tanager, and Blue-and-gold Tanager.

Away from such flocks, we also keep a sharp eye out for the animated White-ruffed Manakin and majestic Ornate Hawk-Eagle. Crowned Woodnymph, Silver-throated Tanager, and Golden-hooded Tanager may also make an appearance.

We enjoy lunch at a local spot and before we check into our lodge. Walk the lodges trails and then later enjoy the opportunity to see two dainty, near-endemic hummingbirds: Black-crested Coquette and Snowcap at the amazing hummingbird garden at the tram site. With luck a territorial Snowcap will be chasing off a Violet-headed Hummingbird or a Crowned Woodnymph — wow! Cap off the Christmas week with a fun aerial tram ride before a celebratory dinner and a final recap of our species list.

*Accommodations at Tapirus Lodge at the Rainforest Tram (B,L,D)*

## **Wed., Dec. 29 Departures**

Enjoy good coffee and breakfast, but then it's time to pack up as we have a 1.5 hour drive from Tapirus to the International Airport in San Jose. Remember we need to be there three hours ahead of flights so plan to fly out after NOON please. (B)

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## Guide Bob Meinke



Bob Meinke started birding in earnest while an undergraduate in plant science at Humboldt State University in northern California. After graduate school he went on to join the botany faculty at Oregon State University (OSU), where he's led the state's Native Plant Conservation Biology Program (in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture) for over 25 years. Bob and his graduate students conducted research on the conservation and recovery of threatened and endangered plants in the western U.S., focusing on life history and re-introduction studies, and have also discovered and named a number of plant species new to science. When not botanizing, Bob enjoys travel with his wife Kelly (also a botanist)—never having lost their early interest in birding, Bob and Kelly have traveled extensively over the years, searching for birds and other wildlife in areas as diverse as Papua New

Guinea, southern India, Fiji and Tonga, Australia, Iceland, Brazil, and southwest Africa. They share a particular interest in the avifauna of Central America, and reside with their cats in an historic neighborhood in Corvallis, Oregon, a few blocks from the OSU campus.

## 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.

### Travel Information

Plan to arrive in San José on Wednesday, December 22, 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. Please plan departures from 12:00 PM onward on Wednesday, December 29.

### Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is \$2890 DBL / \$3435 SGL, from San José, Costa Rica. This cost includes all accommodations, meals as specified in the itinerary, professional guide services, other park and program entrance fees and miscellaneous program expenses. With fewer than six participants, a small group surcharge (typically \$100 – \$300 per participant) may apply.

Tour cost does not include: round-trip transportation from your home city to San José, optional activities, or items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone charges, maid gratuities, or beverages from the bar.

### Photo Credits

Golden-hooded Tanager, Peg Abbott (PA); Broad-winged Hawk, PA; Slaty-tailed Trogon, PA; Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, Sandy Sorkin (SS); Violet Sabrewing, SS; Broad-billed Motmot, Carla Bregman; Black Howler Monkey, PA; Eyelash Pit Viper, SS; Orchid at Hotel Bougainvillea, Greg Smith (GS); Snowcap, SS; Black-faced Grosbeak, SS; Silver-throated Tanager, GS; Golden-hooded Tanager, PA; Resplendent Quetzal, GS; Flame-colored Tanager, GS; Bromeliads x2, GS; Green Iguana, SS; Keel-billed Toucan, PA; Orange-billed Sparrow, GS; Black Guans, SS.