

Costa Rica: Birding & Nature

With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



March 3 – 10, 2022
With Pacific Ext. Mar. 10 – 14

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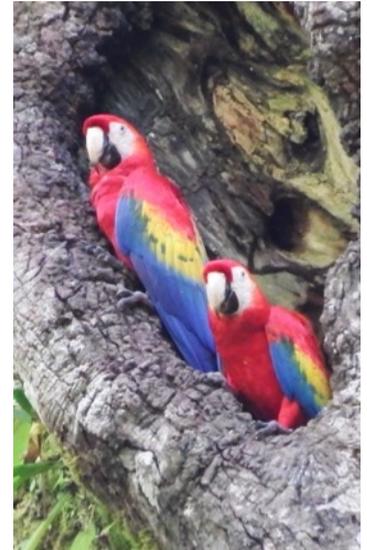
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Naturalist Journeys, LLC



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

— Angela Burnett



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.

On this journey, search La Selva Biological Station for Neotropical specialties. 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 feeds in the rushing stream.

Itinerary

Thurs., Mar. 3 Arrival in San José

Welcome to Costa Rica! Today you arrive in San José where you are met at the airport by a representative from Horizontes, our Costa Rican host company, for a private transfer to the Cariari Hotel. We select this hotel for its spacious rooms, friendly service, and its convenient location near the airport. Take a break, enjoy the pool and surrounding palms, and spot the first birds of the trip. Those arriving in time can enjoy a welcome dinner with fellow traveling companions and guide. Those that arrive later than dinner have a snack tray on arrival.

Accommodations at the Doubletree Cariari Hotel by Hilton (D)

Tour Highlights

- Search for the stunning Resplendent Quetzal in a cloud forest at a private reserve
- Spot Flame-throated Warbler, Flame-colored Tanager, and Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher in the Rio Savegre Valley
- Enjoy close-up hummingbird viewing from the verandah at Rancho Naturalista, perhaps even the one of a kind Snowcap
- Explore and bird the fascinating archaeological site of Guayabo
- Seek out lowland rainforest specialties at La Selva Biological Station, recognized internationally as one of the most productive tropical forest research stations in the world
- Relax on a Sarapiquí River boat trip as you search for Sunbittern, Green Ibis, and Bare-throated Tiger-Heron
- Opt for a five-day Pacific Coast extension to see a mix of species east and west of the Continental Divide

Tour Summary

8-Day / 7-Night Costa Rican Birding & Nature Tour
\$3390 from San José

5-Day / 4-Night Pacific Coast Extension, \$1675
Airport is Juan Santa María International (SJO)



Fri., Mar. 4 Rio Savegre Valley | Montane Cloud Forests

After breakfast we depart for Cerro de la Muerte (Mountain of Death), part of the Talamanca Mountains. These 11,000 foot peaks were named for the 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, Paralso de Quetzales. Here we walk lush forest trails in search of Costa Rica's most famous and elegant bird, the Resplendent Quetzal. 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 7000 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. With luck, we spot an American Dipper feeding in the rushing trout stream! Enjoy a lovely meal tonight at the lodge's restaurant.

Accommodations at Trogon Lodge (B,L,D)

Sat., Mar. 5 Rio Savegre Valley | Montane Cloud Forests

Today, we walk the local road where we get an excellent view of these beautiful Talamanca Range cloud forests and their fantastic residents, like Flame-throated Warbler, Flame-colored Tanager, Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, Black Guan, and Northern Emerald-Toucanet. 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 in the early morning. On trails that wind past rivers and lakes, we look for Collared Trogon, Collared Redstart, Large-footed Finch, Wrenthrush, and Spotted Wood-Quail.

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. Locals raise fruit on the hillsides and farm trout in small ponds.

Accommodations at Trogon Lodge (B,L,D)

Sun., Mar. 6 Guayabo National Park | Rancho Naturalista

Today, we descend in elevation to the Caribbean slope foothills. En route, we visit Guayabo National Monument, a fascinating archaeological site where rocks are carved into figures in many stylized forms. Established in 1973, it is the largest and one of the most impressive archaeological sites in Costa Rica. While it does not rival the great Maya civilization sites, this complex settlement lies in a beautiful valley, perched on the side of a mountain. We find cobblestone paths, building foundations, and water canals that date from 1100 BC to 1400 AD. Forests surrounding the site vary from second growth to dense mature forest. Vegetation is lush and beautiful, and mixed flocks of colorful tanagers, grosbeaks, and orioles like the edge-effect of the excavated ruins.

We enjoy lunch at a restaurant along our travel route and, upon our late afternoon arrival at the lodge, we enjoy birding from the veranda. This is a delight — particularly for those that fancy close-up views of hummingbirds. A number of mid-elevation Caribbean-side specialties can be found here, including Black-crested Coquette, Snowcap, Green Thorntail, and Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer. Temperatures are cooler at a comfortable 3000 feet. At day's end, we are likely to see both Keel-billed and Yellow-throated Toucan coming in to roost.

Accommodations at Rancho Naturalista (B,L,D)

Mon., Mar. 7 Birding Mid-Montane Forests | Rancho Naturalista Grounds

Wake up and bird on the balcony where, with luck, a mixed group of colorful tanagers works the bananas on the feeders. We can hope for Scarlet-rumped, Speckled, Bay-headed, Silver-throated, and Emerald. White-necked Jacobin are regulars, and a special treat is the tiny Black-crested Coquette. Lesson's Motmot and Golden-olive Woodpecker are "yard birds." Indeed, over 200 species have been seen from this balcony! Linger as we may, trails and exploring calls.

Though small (125 acres), the reserve has a nice mix of habitats. Open crowns of Cecropia trees afford us good looks at colorful species like Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Squirrel Cuckoo, and Yellow-throated Euphonia. White-ruffed Manakin and Thicket Antpitta call frequently, alerting us to their presence along the trails. One of the trails leads



us to hummingbird feeders set up in the forest. Here we often find the stunning Snowcap, alongside colorful Crowned Woodnymph, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, and Green Hermit.
Accommodations at Rancho Naturalista (B,L,D)

Tues., Mar. 8 La Selva Biological Station

After breakfast, we depart for La Selva Biological Station in the Caribbean lowlands, perhaps with a few quick birding stops along the way to stretch our legs and enjoy our first set of birds: hummingbirds, barbets, tanagers, and more!

We arrive by around lunch time. After a sumptuous lunch and settling into our lodging, we visit local birding hotspots in this lovely area. Many private gardens attract a rich array of hummingbirds and tanagers, with species we may encounter this afternoon including Scarlet-rumped Tanager, Green Honeycreeper, Montezuma Oropendola, Black-cowled Oriole, Keel-billed Toucan, and Collared Aracari. Green Macaw regularly visits a nearby site in the late afternoon before going to roost. If we are lucky, we might even see a pair of roosting Spectacled Owl!

Accommodations at Sarapiquí Lodge (B,L,D)

Wed., Mar. 9 La Selva Biological Station | Sarapiquí River Boat Tour

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 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. Red-ored 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 excellent.

Accommodations at SarapiquíS Lodge (B,L,D)

Pacific Coast Extension

Thurs., Mar. 10 Departures or Extension

Enjoy breakfast at the hotel before departing. We must tear ourselves away as our bus departs for San José and the airport (schedule for flights in the afternoon for those not joining us on the extension)—or, a better idea: If time permits, veer off towards the Pacific Ocean and Costa Rica's west side by joining our Pacific Coast Extension. By choosing the extension, you get to experience the widest range of habitats and species available—the Pacific side of the divide hosts a grand array of different species, potentially up to a 100 or more additional bird species may be observed! Taking the main tour and extension together gives you a great cross-section of the country.



For those continuing on the extension...

After breakfast, we drive to La Ensenada, a country lodge on the Gulf of Nicoya. This family-run lodge, where we stay the next two nights, features 20 simple and comfortable, cabins, a swimming pool, and a delightful open-air restaurant that prepares local foods. The lodge is part of a working cattle ranch and fruit farm, and also part of a 100-acre wildlife reserve. All cabins have ceiling fans, wood paneling, high ceilings, and private terraces. This special property holds some of the last remaining primary (old growth) dry forest, as well as a mangrove ecosystem, and is on the beautiful Gulf of Nicoya.

As we settle in, watch the sky for Magnificent Frigatebird and Brown Pelican; we may also be able to enjoy our first Central American dry forest species: Streak-backed and Spot-breasted Oriole, Banded Wren, Cinnamon Hummingbird, and White-lored Gnatcatcher. Pacific Screech-Owl regularly roost right in the parking lot, and Rose-throated Becard often nest in the large trees in front of our cabins. Make sure to watch the sunset – a lovely bay hemmed in by the Nicoya Peninsula. Paradise.

Accommodations at La Ensenada Lodge (B,L,D)

Fri., Mar. 11 Boat & Tractor Tours

After breakfast at the hotel, we venture out to enjoy a great birding site near the Gulf of Nicoya at a private reserve.

The deltas of the Bebederas River, or Rio Abangeres, both have a tremendous array of wetland habitats: mangroves, swamps, swamp forests, both fresh and saltwater marshes, and lagoons. Herons and egrets congregate here, joined by the ancient-looking Wood Stork. A verdant oasis in the driest region of Costa Rica, the Gulf of Nicoya is a birdwatcher's paradise. Because the Tempisque is a tidal river, salt-water loving American Crocodiles venture upstream. More than 300 species of birds have been recorded here, and an estimated 250,000 wading birds and waterfowl winter here, giving us tremendous opportunities for spectacular sightings.

Large-scale seasonal flooding occurs here; as the dry season progresses, the wetland habitat shrinks, concentrating the bird population. Black-bellied and Fulvous Whistling Ducks can be quite common in some years, and many North American ducks winter in the estuary. Touring by boat is the perfect way to explore its riches. At cooler times of the day we walk trails in tropical dry forest. The limestone cliffs in this area pose quite a contrast to the volcanic region we previously visited. There are also pre-Hispanic archaeological sites in the region.

In the afternoon we tour the ranch by tractor, ending our day with wine and cheese at sunset — such a life! In dry forests we watch for White-throated Magpie-Jay, Lesser Ground-Cuckoo, Double-striped Thick-knee, and Black-headed Trogon. We then return to the lodge for dinner and a relaxing evening to tally our wildlife sightings.

Accommodations at Ensenada Lodge (B,L,D)



Sat., Mar. 12 Hacienda Solimar Private Reserve | Central Pacific Coast

Hacienda Solimar is a working cattle ranch with seasonally flooded pasture that attract literally thousands of birds. Such is the productivity of the habitat, that Hacienda Solimar is one of the few places in Central America to regularly host numbers of Jabiru (the largest flying bird in Central America). The fields here also hold large numbers of shorebirds, herons and egrets, and raptors. Small numbers of Scissor-tailed Flycatcher also winter here. A visit to this hacienda is a spectacle not to be missed!

Afterwards, the group continues to the Central Pacific area, where we stay in a lovely valley with a rushing river, close to the Pacific Ocean. The hotel and dining room sit aside a small river, and there is a steady stream of species coming in, including Long-tailed Manakin, Laughing Falcon, and Slaty-tailed Trogon.

This afternoon we take a mangrove boat trip on the Tarcoles River. This is a great complement to our boat trip on the Sarapiquí, with this particular trip exploring mature mangrove forest. Denizens of this impressive and unique forest include the endemic Mangrove Hummingbird, which feeds mostly on the nectar of Tea Mangrove, as well as Roseate Spoonbill, Common Black Hawk, and Prothonotary Warbler. 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 Yellow-naped Parrot and, close-at-hand, noisy Rufous-naped Wren.

Accommodations at Villa Lapas (B,L,D)

Sun., Mar. 13 Carara National Park | Return to San Jose

This morning we have an early start to enjoy a full morning of birding at Carara National Park, a place many consider to be one of the top ten birding spots in Central America. Here we witness birds and wildlife of a transition forest between humid evergreen and tropical deciduous, walking trails and searching for birds, butterflies, and mammals. This park can claim almost unparalleled diversity along the Central American Pacific Coast, as many species here are at the edge of their range. This is the northern reach of species at home in Pacific Rainforest, and the southern reach for those associated with Pacific Dry Forests.

Carara's forests' more open nature makes it easier for us to find birds. Carara is an excellent place to observe an army-ant swarm and its attendant feeding antbirds. We may find Scaly-breasted Hummingbird or Blue-throated



Goldentail, Orange-collared Manakin, Black-hooded Antshrike, Dot-winged Antwren, Dusky Antbird, and Chestnut-backed Antbird are among the more secretive species we hope to find. Vegetation is impressive in this important ecological reserve. We depart in the afternoon back to our airport in San Jose.

Tonight, we enjoy a farewell dinner with friends as we prepare to depart in the morning.
Accommodations at the Doubletree Cariari Hotel by Hilton (B,L,D)

Mon., Mar. 14 Departures

After breakfast we offer a group transfer to San José's Juan Santamaría International Airport to take your flights back home. Keep in mind that you should be at the airport almost three hours ahead of your flight, so watch those early morning departures! It's very nice to have a leisurely morning at this lovely hotel and gardens. If you must leave early, we can arrange a private transfer for you (small additional cost), shared with others if they are also leaving early. Otherwise, we suggest you plan on flights out after 12:00 PM. (B)

Naturalist Journeys, LLC is an equal opportunity service provider and committed to the goal of ensuring equal opportunity for all in employment and program delivery.

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.

Group Size

Maximum of 10, minimum of 6 persons. Tour and Extension prices are based on 8 persons for the main tour and 6 persons for the extension, with fewer than 8/6 a small group surcharge (typically \$100-\$300) may apply. With a group of 9 or more, a Naturalist Journeys guide joins.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey (Main Tour) is \$3390 DBL / \$3690 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. Cost of the Pacific Coast extension is \$1675 DBL / \$1850 SGL.

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.

Travel Information

Plan to arrive in San José on March 9, ideally between 2:00 and 5:00 PM if you wish to join the welcome dinner at the hotel. If your flight arrives after 6:00 PM plan on eating dinner on the plane, or we can hold a late meal for you at the hotel.

You may want to arrive a day early (at your own cost) to take in sights of the city. We have blocked a limited number of early night rooms at the Hotel Bougainvillea for this; after they are taken it will be on an as available basis but we are happy to help. You can also arrive to an airport hotel with a shuttle if coming in late the night ahead. We suggest you plan departures for after 12:00 PM on March 10, though earlier or later flights can be accommodated. Those going on the extension may depart at a time convenient for you on March 14 (suggested after 12:00 PM). Do remember you have to be at the airport about three hours ahead of your scheduled flight on this return so we do not advise booking early morning flights; late-morning is fine.

Photo Credits

Fiery-throated Hummingbird, Greg Smith (GS); Scarlet Macaws, Robert Hill; Collared Aracari, James Adams; Three-toed Sloth, PA; Eyelash Pit Viper, Sandy Sorkin (SS); Golden-hooded Tanager, Peg Abbott (PA); Bare-throated Tiger Heron, Carlos Sanchez (CS); Resplendent Quetzal, GS; American Dipper, Gary Stone; Flame-colored Tanager, Paul Roberts (PR); Large-footed Finch, SS; Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Andrew Steinmann; 2020 Group at La Selva, James P. Smith (JS); Spectacled Owls, SS; Montezuma Oropendula, GS; Golden-hooded Tanager, PA; Sungrebe, CS; Keel-billed Toucan, Doug Greenberg; Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, SS; Red-legged Honeycreeper, CS; Blue Dacnis, SS; Green Honeycreeper, SS; Squirrel Cuckoo, SS; Magnificent Hummingbird, SS; Crested Caracaras, PA; Capuchin Monkeys, PA; Blue-capped Motmot, PA.