

# Costa Rica Summer Birding

with Naturalist Journeys

July 21 – 30, 2023

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*“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

Few places rival Costa Rica's ecological diversity. Over a quarter of the country is protected lands, boasting 850 bird species and 200+ mammals. Why July? Resident birds are just fledging their young, and rains bring life to so many life forms. Afternoon clouds cool down temperatures and we spend time in the mountains!

We visit a wonderful mix of habitats, giving you the chance to see numerous species. 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 Arenal Observatory with a volcano in view and Monteverde Mountain Lodge with birdy and accessible trails. Finally, spend time at Carara National Park near Tarcoles.

Explore both sides of the Continental Divide on this fun summer Costa Rica birding tour—what a great way to immerse yourself in Costa Rica's stunning biodiversity and observe an exciting list of birds and other wildlife.

## Tour Summary

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

\$3790 DBL / \$4425 SGL, from San José

Airport is Juan Santamaría International (SJO)

## Tour Highlights

- Relax at the beautiful Hotel Bougainvillea upon your arrival; bird their 10-acre award winning botanical garden where birds and beautiful sculptures mingle
- Search for hummingbirds, trogons, and mammals too, from Monteverde Mountain Lodge, nestled in lush cloud forest
- View the Arenal Volcano right from your balcony!
- Admire lowland primary rainforest at La Selva Biological Station
- Stay cool up in the mountains—explore Monteverde and Santa Elena Cloud Forest Reserves in search of Resplendent Quetzal, Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Collared Redstart, and Azure-hooded Jay
- Visit famous Carara National Park to see stunning Scarlet Macaw and secretive antbirds

## Day-to-Day Itinerary

### Fri., July 21 Arrivals in San José | 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)*

**Sat., July 22 – Mon., July 24**

## **La Selva Biological Station | Arenal Observatory Lodge | La Fortuna**

We leave early today to head to the lowlands of Sarapiquí, on our way to Arenal—well worth a stop. Enjoy a visit to one of the world's premier biological stations as we seek out some extraordinary birds. We've even seen Great Tinamou nesting here!

We then travel west to La Fortuna. At an elevation of about one thousand feet, we settle in to awesome digs at Arenal Observatory Lodge and enjoy visits to the nearby town of La Fortuna feature Caribbean foothill rainforest. Due to the perpetually mild and wet climate, this habitat is particularly rich in fruit-eating birds such as toucans, oropendolas, and tanagers. Ant swarms are also a big feature. Most of Costa Rica's obligate antbirds inhabit the understory of this rainforest.

Arenal Observatory Lodge is a particularly comfortable lodge from which to explore this habitat. There is a beautiful terrace that looks upon the currently dormant Arenal Volcano and an elaborate set of fruit feeders. Collared Aracari, Yellow-throated Toucan, Montezuma Oropendola, and Black-cheeked Woodpecker all squabble over the tasty morsels of papaya, banana, and other fruit on offer. Once the larger birds have had their fill, tanagers such as Crimson-collared, Emerald, and Bay-headed often make a pass at the fruit.

On the forest floor, there is often Gray-chested Dove, Black-striped Sparrow, and Great Curassow picking off the scraps from above. The lodge grounds also feature lovely flower gardens and thoughtfully placed fruiting trees (mostly Ficus), which attract many birds from the surrounding forest. Row upon row of flowering blue porterweed attract Black-crested Coquette, Brown Violetear, Green Thorntail, Violet-headed Hummingbird, and Bronze-tailed Plumeleater. Wide, carefully maintained, and gently sloping forest trails offer fantastic birding opportunities. Every day is different—even every hour is different! Some of the birds that regularly make an appearance include Dull-mantled Antbird, Thicket Antpitta, Broad-billed Motmot, Semiplumbeous Hawk, and Black-and-yellow Tanager. For those that happen upon an ant swarm, antbird species such as Bicolored, Spotted, and Ocellated Antbird are possible.

During our days here, we explore both in and around the lodge grounds and take local, off-site field trips too. Outside the grounds of Arenal Observatory Lodge, the entrance road and nearby national park offer great birding. White-faced Nunbird, Slaty-tailed Trogon, Rufous Mourner, and Long-tailed Tyrant are all regular along the 'peninsula road.' The more open pastures can have the spectacular White-throated Magpie-Jay, a species usually associated with the dry forests of the Guanacaste region. The small river that crosses underneath the road often has Black Phoebe and (for those who are lucky) Bare-throated Tiger-Heron.

Down at La Fortuna, Sendero Bogarin features secondary growth forest crisscrossed by streams. The birds here are similar but different from those found at Arenal Observatory Lodge. Uniform Crake, White-throated Crake, and Russet-naped Wood-Rail are all common here, although they are not always easy to see. The brushy thickets hold several territories of Black-throated Wren, Fasciated Antshrike, Keel-billed Motmot, and Rufous-tailed Jacamar. Among flocks of tanagers, one sometimes finds the tiny Olivaceous Piculet, the smallest woodpecker in North America. The owner of the property often has a staked out Black-and-white Owl roost, as well as multiple spots to look for both Brown-throated Three-toed and Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloths. After birding here, there is a nice chocolate shop in town with locally sourced chocolate, coffee, and fresh baked goods!

We also enjoy some prized feet-up on the balcony of your room time, looking off to the volcano ....  
*Accommodations at Arenal Observatory Lodge (B,L,D)*

**Tues., July 25**

## **Higher into the Mountains | Monteverde | Children's Eternal Rainforest**

We leave Arenal this morning for another fabled Costa Rican destination. Traveling up a gradient of elevation allows us to bird in varied habitats—great fun!

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 at the veranda.

This afternoon, we enjoy birding the Children's Eternal Rainforest, a special place. We may 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)*

## **Wed., July 26 Monteverde Cloudforest Reserve | Curicancha Reserve**

This morning we visit the famous Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, one of the best places to find Resplendent Quetzal. 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 search for fruit in the canopy. This place is also 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)*

## **Thurs., July 27 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. Both should have fledgling young at this time and are rewarding to find and watch.

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 check out the local butterfly gardens, 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)*

### **Fri., July 28 Central Pacific Coast | Tarcoles River Boat Trip**

This morning we pack up and continue on our way to the Central Pacific area, where we stay in a lovely valley with a rushing river near the Pacific Ocean. Enjoy sampling the countryside as the morning is largely spent in travel. We arrive in time for lunch.

This afternoon we take a mangrove boat trip on the Tarcoles River. Gliding along we find a good mix of new species. If time permits, especially if we have not seen macaws on our boat trip, we also 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 Hotel Cerro Lodge (B,L,D)*

### **Sat., July 29 Carara National Park**

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, 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.

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. Vegetation is impressive in this important ecological reserve.

We return to bird the grounds of our lodge, have time to relax a bit and join together for a special evening sharing highlights of our journey.

*Accommodations at Hotel Cerro Lodge (B,L,D)*

### **Sun., July 30 Departures**

After breakfast this morning we say goodbye and transfer back to San José's Juan Santamaría International Airport to take your flights back home. This is an hour+ drive, so in order not to rush this morning, please plan to make flights out after 2:00 PM. (B)

## Tour Details

### Plan Ahead!

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

### Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is \$3790 DBL / \$4425 SGL, based on double occupancy, from San José, Costa Rica. Cost includes nine nights' accommodations, all meals as noted in the itinerary, airport transfers, ground transportation, professional guide services, park and other entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. Not included is round-trip airfare to and from San José, personal expenses such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, and gratuities for luggage handling or other services. Guide gratuities are at your discretion.

### Travel Information

Please plan to arrive at Juan Santamaría International (SJO) no later than 5:00 PM on July 21. Please plan departure flights after 2:00 PM on July 30.

### 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.

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