

Christmas in Costa Rica

with Naturalist Journeys

December 22 – 29, 2023

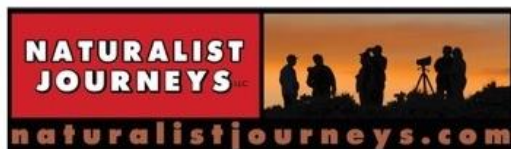
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Few places rival Costa Rica's ecological diversity. Over a quarter of the country is a national park, wildlife refuge, biological reserve, or protected area. And for good reason: Costa Rica boasts 850 bird species, 208 mammal species, 50,000 insect 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
 \$3690 DBL / \$4250 SGL, from San José
 Airport is Juan Santa María International (SJO)

Itinerary



Fri., 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)*

Sat., 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 Talamancan 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)

Sun., 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 Brazilleto, 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)

Mon., 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 bromelidad-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)

Tues., Dec. 26 Guayabo National Park

Today we continue on to the Caribbean lowlands. 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 along the way at a local restaurant and, once settled in at our hotel, we visit local birding hotspots around this lovely community. Many private gardens attract a rich array of hummingbirds, and having changed elevation, many species, particularly of colorful tanagers, are new.
Accommodations at Selva Verde (B,L,D)

Wed., Dec. 27 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 or Slaty-breasted Tinamou, Great Potoo, and possibly Bare-necked Umbrellabird. We should see Crimson-collared and Golden-hooded Tanagers, Rufous Motmot, endemic Black-cheeked Woodpecker, beautiful Snowy Cotinga, and, high on thermals above, King Vulture. Pied Puffbird and Great Jacamar are sit-and-wait predators that dart from perches to capture large insects. Orange-billed Sparrow are gaudy 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.

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, Fasciated Tiger-Heron, several kingfishers, herons, and egrets. Yellow-naped 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 cool and views of the mountains are spectacular.

Accommodations at Selva Verde (B,L,D)

Thurs., 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 lodge's 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)

Fri., 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)

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 December 22 by 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 December 29.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is \$3690 DBL / \$4250 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.

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