

# Costa Rica

## Motmots & Manakins

### A Greentours Itinerary

Two of the Neotropics most distinctive, beautiful and charismatic bird families are a particular focus on this tour. There are half a dozen species of Motmot and we've a good chance of seeing them all. And we'll also meet eight of the nine Costa Rican Manakins, each a little beauty, and we'll see a number of these performing their sometimes explosive, sometimes quirky displays. Like all our tours to Costa Rica we'll also focus on the rich diversity of animal life, whether it is butterflies, birds, mammals or amphibians.

### Day 1

#### Arrive San Jose, Costa Rica

Our flight arrives into San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica, in the evening and we'll head for the Buena Vista Chic Hotel in Bajos del Toro in nice countryside not far from San Jose Airport.

### Days 2 – 3(am)

#### San Jose and Bosque de Paz

In the morning we'll head straight to the Bosque de Paz Lodge and begin a holiday packed with a never-ending stream of new wildlife and it starts right in the hotel grounds. Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrushes and Great Kiskadees serenade us as we admire orchids such as apricot-coloured clumps of *Acineta densa* and the strange *Trichosalpinx memor* looking like so many dark and white chocolates hanging from a branch! Many butterflies are attracted to the thin blue wands of *Stachytarpheta*, especially spectacular 'long-tailed' skippers and strikingly coloured *Heliconius hecale*. Costa Rica's spectacular birdlife might begin with a brilliant Blue-crowned Motmot, the cryptically-patterned Scaled Antpitta, or perhaps the fabulous Emerald Toucanet. The lodges hummingbird feeders can barely cope it seems with the throngs of these tiny iridescent birds. Over twenty species of hummingbird visit, among them Magenta-throated Woodstar, Green Thorntail and the fabulous shimmering jewel that is the Purple-crowned Fairy. Groups of Black Guans also come to the gardens, these rare birds are particularly approachable here, whilst early mornings White-nosed Coatis come into the garden to check for a quick meal. At night Pacas come out of the forest into the garden. We'll walk the property marveling at the brilliance of Red-headed Barbets and Scarlet-thighed Dacnis as the spectacular Ornate Hawk-Eagle soars overhead. In fact the embodiment of avian glory, the Resplendent Quetzal, is a frequent visitor here, or maybe we should save them up for later in the trip. Under forest we'll start to familiarize ourselves with the many less showy birds such as

Immaculate Antbird though we'll no doubt be impressed by Buffy Tuffedcheek and the Gray-throated Leaf-tosser!

### **Days 3(pm) – 5(am)**

#### **Volcan Tenorio – mid-elevation Caribbean habitats**

The Sueños Río Celeste Lodge provides a marvellous opportunity to explore the mid-elevation Caribbean forests which are not only exceptionally species rich but also very beautiful. The lodge's main trail winds through forests on the lower slopes of Volcan Tenorio. Scarlet-flowered *Acanthaceans* and herbs such as *Dieffenbachia* form the understory of the primary pre-montane forest. Chestnut-mandibled Toucans visit trees hung with large tubular white flowers and the enormous banana-like seedpods that are characteristic of the *Bignoniaceae* family. A suspension bridge leads to a large platform around a massive tree providing fantastic views into the canopy. A great spot to watch Mantled Howlers from, their roar a common sound in this forest. Cattleheart swallowtails enjoy the sunshine and here we can see the canopy-dwelling glasswing *Olyras insignis*. Crowned Woodnymphs feed on pathside flowers and we'll see Long-tailed Woodcreepers, Stripe-breasted Wren and red and grey Slaty-tailed Trogon. Great Curassows wander across the path as we stop to photograph *Cithaerias menander*, a truly stunning glasswing with almost clear wings, the hindwings though flushed a strong pink. Impressive *Morpho peleides* will be on patrol as we peer into the flowery undergrowth searching out the rare Blue Seedeater, as well as Black-hooded Antshrikes and the fabulous Ocellated Antbird. We'll locate the uncommon Keel-billed Motmot, and hope to meet the gorgeous little Tody Motmot, a tiny motmot whose unobtrusive nature makes it difficult to spot. Another trail leads up into higher forests to a lake frequented by Baird's Tapirs but more likely we'll encounter mixed tanager flocks, Emerald Toucanet and Orange-bellied Trogon.

### **Days 5(pm) and 6(am)**

#### **Caño Negro – mid-elevation Caribbean**

We'll also take a day trip to the extensive wetlands at Caño Negro National Park where the receding dry season waters will be concentrating the many wintering ducks, herons, ibises, anhingas and stunning pink Roseate Spoonbills. Amazon, Green and Ringed Kingfishers seem to be everywhere. Spectacled Caimans lounge on the banks, their mouths a-gape. Bare-throated Tiger Heron and the outrageous Boat-billed Heron with its outsize beak and huge eyes will be much enjoyed. Black-collared Hawk and Snail Kites hunt overhead whilst riverside shrubs host the rich yellow Prothonotary Warbler, Mangrove Cuckoo and the highly localized Spot-breasted Wren.

Back at the lodge Central American Spider Monkeys will keep us entertained whilst the bird feeders around the hotel are chock full of Blue-gray, Palm and Passerini's Tanagers, handsome Yellow-throated Euphonias and Black-cowled Orioles.

## **Days 6(pm) – 8(am)**

### **Tirimbina Rainforest Lodge – low-elevation Caribbean**

We've three days to explore the lowland Caribbean forests at Tirimbina as well as the higher forests of the Braulio Carillio National Park. Tirimbina is set amongst a large tract of forest by the wide Rio Sarapiquí and close to excellent Selva Biological Station. Green and Ringed Kingfishers are seen along the river along with Sunbittern and Rufescent Tiger Heron. Walking the many trails we'll come across Great Tinamou, flocks of Checker-throated and White-flanked Antwrens, Tawny-faced Gnatcatcher and Western Slaty Antshrike. As we stop to photograph the Strawberry Poison Frogs, beautifully patterned tightly coiled Hog-nosed Pit-vipers may come into focus! We'll see Norops lizards and the bigger Central American Whiptails as Great Green Macaws call raucously from the canopy. Blue, black and white *Heliconius cydno* offers a different colour combination from most heliconid butterflies. The butterflies are generally impressive here, none more so than the shimmering blue *Morpho peleides*. Another rather outsize version of the familiar is the Helicopter Damselfly *Megaloprepus caerulea* with its overlong abdomen and long blue-tipped wings.

Keel-billed Toucans and Red-lore Parrots feed noisily in trees where large groups of Mantled Howlers gather, their dawn chorus is something we'll no doubt enjoy! Handsome White-fronted Nunbirds hawk for insects as groups of Collared Peccaries snuffle in herbage below. A characteristic and common animal of the forests around Tirimbina is Hoffmann's Two-toed Sloth. We'll likely encounter them both day and night, however it will take nightwalks to reveal Tarantulas, big wolf spiders, large phasmids, whip scorpions and spiders with golden-red orb webs. We'll also see owls and Pauraques and of course many frog species too.

We'll be on the look-out for swarms of army ants as these offer one of the most exciting visual manifestations of the ecology of these forests. The ants themselves are exciting and rather scary in their own way, however we'll soon forget them when confronted with their followers, a varied cohort of birds and (less-visible) animals. Red-throated Ant-Tanagers, various ant-shrikes and ant-birds and many woodcreepers including the impressive Northern Barred Woodcreeper search for insects flushed by the column's relentless progress. Butterflies are flushed too – we'll see the Great Banded Owl Butterfly and *Mesosemia carissima* with iridescent blue hindwings. However the prize here will be another extraordinary glasswing, the transparent *Dulcedo polita* a localised species of lowland swamp forest with black-etched veins and a clear blue tint to the otherwise glass-like wings.

A magnificent tract of primary premontane forest stretches from the Caribbean lowlands to San Jose and the Braulio Carillio National Park protects a large swathe of

this and provides access with a couple of good trails. The trails take us through a remarkably verdant understorey of palms, ferns and heliconias, the trees wrapped in mosses and laden with bromeliads and anthuriums. Butterflies flit across the path including the lovely clearwing *Cithaereas pireta*, blue flashes from *Mesosemia* species and the pink-winged beauty *Pierella helvetica*. Common Tent-making Bats roost underneath a 'tent' they make by cutting part of the palm leaf and pulling it down – a very effective shelter. We'll be mesmerized by the lovely forest scenes, the many dragonflies and the golden ants. There are many beautiful birds not least the Snowcap a gorgeous little hummer dressed in reddish-purple and topped by a pure white cap as well as Orange-billed Sparrow and the scarce Dull-mantled Antbird. We'll keep a careful lookout for the extraordinary Umbrellabird, a rare species but this is a good time of year to encounter them and this area is just one of several possible locations on our itinerary.

### **Days 8(pm) – 10(am) Rancho Naturalista**

Still on the Caribbean Slope we move to the Cordillera Talamanca and the marvellous Rancho Naturalista. We'll actually be staying not at the lodge itself but in nearby Turrialba which is half an hour from Rancho Naturalista but we'll have full access to the Rancho's property during our visit. Situated around 900m above sea level the lodge commands superb views of Volcan Turrialba and the even higher Volcan Irazu, both topping 3000m. An extensive network of trails allows us to explore the 50 hectare private reserve. This sounds small by comparison with some of the lodge reserves we'll visit on this tour, however the mix of primary forest, wooded pasture and mountain streams is home to an amazing biodiversity. 430 bird species have been recorded in and around the reserve! Rancho Naturalista is probably most famous for its hummingbird feeders and hummingbird pools. Each evening Violet-crowned Woodnymph, the lovely Snowcap and fantastic Purple-crowned Fairy visit these pools to bathe, a fantastic photographic opportunity for us. There are so many hummingbirds at Rancho Naturalista. A dozen or so species frequent the balconies and the feeders – elegant White-necked Jacobin, Violet Sabrewing, the Red-footed Plumeleater, and the lovely Black-crested Coquette too. We could spend all our time with the hummers, but there's so much else to see here. Green Basilisks and Variegated Squirrels both visit the balconies, whilst on the lawns are Brazilian Rabbits. The lodge operates two moth lights that each evening bring in a staggering variety of moths, as well as other fantastic insects like the Harlequin Beetle, Lichen Katydid and the impressive but weird Dobson's Fly. Common birds around the lodge and the reserve are Montezuma's Oropendulas, White-crowned Parrots, and fabulous wing-snapping White-collared Manakin at their lek. The lovely Golden-hooded Tanager is a frequent sight, its local name meaning 'seven-coloured tanager', a reflection of its complicated plumage! Rancho Naturalista has a number of birds that are rare elsewhere, the Snowcap and Black-crested Coquette included, but there are also the beautiful Spotted Ant-Bird, Tawny-throated Leaf-tosser, Thrushlike Schiffornis (you

can't come home unless you've seen one of those!) and an isolated population of the range-restricted White-crowned Manakin. The delightfully smart little White-ruffed Manakin is the final piece in our manakin puzzle, only the range-restricted Lance-tailed Manakin is not possible on this tour.

### **Days 10(pm) – 13(am)**

#### **San Gerardo Dota – Cerro de la Muerte cloudforests**

After lunch on Day 10 we'll travel to the Suria Hotel which sits amid the cloudforests to the south of the Costa Rican capital high on the Pacific-facing slopes of the Cerro de la Muerte. Trails through the cloudforests offer us the chance of seeing some really special birds such as Red-headed Barbet and Scaled Antpitta. The distinctive silhouette of the American Swallow-tailed Kite is frequently seen overhead, less often Ornate Hawk-Eagles. Hummingbirds are again plentiful and there are a goodly number of species we might only see here. White-tailed Emerald and Violet Sabrewing are of particular note, both often within the lodge grounds and frequently to be seen from the balconies or around the restaurant. Large numbers of Silver-throated Tanagers visit the lodge feeders!

Amongst some of Costa Rica's finest ethereal landscapes we can see Fiery-throated Hummingbird, Long-tailed Silky Flycatcher and Sulphur-winged Parakeets. Purple flowered *Fuchsia paniculata* and the epiphytic orchid *Epidendrum radicans* shine out of the mists. Amongst the handsome foliage of *Gunnera insignis* we'll find the gigantic pink or white flowered *Dahlia imperialis*. Avocado trees are favoured by Costa Rica's most famous bird, the magnificent Resplendent Quetzal, thought by many to be the world's most beautiful bird. These dazzling creatures can be observed at close quarters as they focus on downing the energy-filled fruits! Our lodge's feeders attract the glorious Magnificent Hummingbird as well as Green-crowned Brilliant, Green Violet-ear and the tiny Volcano Hummingbird, the male furnished with a shining violet collar. The grounds host Blue-hooded Euphonia, Yellow-thighed Finch, Collared Trogons, and as Red-tailed Squirrels play along the boughs, we'll search through the Tanager flocks, noting Flame-coloured, Silver-throated and Spangle-cheeked amongst others. The highest point of the pass is above the cloud-forest. Here is a bizarre flora of strange umbellifers and Hypericums and we'll look for Volcano Juncos and admire lovely orange-flowered *Bomareas*, vivid magenta *Salvias* and fine *Calceolarias*.

### **Days 13(pm) - 17(am)**

#### **Bosque del Cabo – Osa Peninsula in the Pacific Lowlands**

Bosque del Cabo's fantastic private reserve overlooks the Pacific Ocean from the headlands of the Osa Peninsula. Run by a keen naturalist who has produced a book on the Osa Peninsula's natural riches, this superb place is ideal for those that want to be constantly amazed by new fauna and flora. All four of Costa Rica's monkey species are common here and the lodge is host to many rare species such as Yellow-



bellied Cotinga and the local Golfo Dulce Poison-dart Frog. The rainforest here has been described by the National Geographic as "the most biologically intense place on earth". Rare Central American Squirrel Monkeys, huge Green Iguanas and elegant Chestnut-mandibled Toucans seem to visit the balconies of each of our gorgeous cabins in turn, like some kind of welcoming committee! Flocks of brilliantly-coloured tanagers feed above us whilst stunning Fiery-billed Aracaris and both Baird's and Slaty-tailed Trogons feed on Zapote trees surrounding then gardens! Dawn echoes to the loud calls of family groups of Mantled Howler Monkeys that, along with White-faced Capuchins and Central American Spider Monkeys, pass through the lodge grounds on a regular basis. A well-maintained system of trails takes us through a rainforest of buttressed trees and beautiful bright yellow and orange heliconids. Inside are such gems - the shimmering blue *Morpho amathonte* patrols sun-dappled streams where Jesus Christ Lizards hurtle across the water on two legs as we approach. Brown-throated Three-toed Sloths move in ultra slow motion, whilst pale Tent-making Bats peer back at us from their finely stitched shelters. Impossibly delicate 'Helicopter Damselflies' (*Megaloprepus coerulatus*) are a whirr of crazily angled wings, whilst a metallic 'chink' reveals the minuscule Little Hermit hummingbird - certainly smaller than the damselfly! Glorious Red-capped Manakins display in undergrowth inhabited by Barred Antshrikes and fantastic Poison Dart Frogs - the glistening black and turquoise *Dendrobates auratus* and the tiny copper-lined *Phyllobates vittatus*. On the grounds is a little pond which attracts all sorts of other frogs as well the amazing Cat-eyed Snake which is of course hoping to dine on frogs legs! Variegated Squirrels play in the vines and an abundance of birdlife includes White-shouldered Tanager, Plain Xenops, Olivaceous Flatbill, both Black-throated and Violaceous Trogons, and the White-whiskered Puffbird. Scarlet Macaws fly in to roost each evening and we'll be in position to watch their garish colours illuminated by the lowering sun. Walking local trails we'll watch shimmering Blue Morphos and Black-and-green Poison-dart Frogs hop through the forest litter and above Three-toed Sloths are quite common in the Cecropia Trees. Virtually the entire suite of lowland rainforest mammals from Central America are found around Bosque and sightings of such elusive species as Ocelot and Jaguarundi are not infrequent and Tayras and Tapirs can sometimes be seen too. Glasswing Butterflies pause on floribund vines, and iridescent Beryl-crowned Hummingbirds call loudly from branches bedecked in little bromeliads. White Hawks and Bat Falcons hunt overhead and, off-shore from the miles of fine beaches patrolled by Magnificent Frigatebirds, are Bottle-nosed Dolphins and, probably, Humpback Whales.

## **Days 17(pm) & 18**

### **The Pacific Coast at Dominical & Departure**

After breakfast on Day 17 we'll cross from the Osa Peninsula to the mainland and travel along the Pacific Coast to Dominical. En route we'll no doubt stop for various wildlife encounters which might include Swallowtailed Kites, Three-toed Sloths and

Fiery-billed Aracari. A big fig tree en route usually attracts interesting birds and we can hope for Yellow-billed Cotinga here.

We'll settle into La Cusinga. In the later afternoon and the next morning we'll walk amongst five-century old Ajo trees and watch Blue-crowned Manakins and equally Blue-crowned Motmots amid a fine tract of primary Pacific Rainforest. Also here will be Violaceous Trogon, Cherries' Tanagers and Wedge-billed Woodcreeper. We can hope to see Green-and-black Poison Frogs too.

After lunch on Day 18 we'll make the short journey back to the International Airport in San Jose.

## **Day 19**

### **Arrive UK/Europe**

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