

Costa Rica

Wildlife at Leisure

A Greentours Itinerary

Day 1

Arrive San Jose, Costa Rica

Our flight arrives into San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica, in the afternoon and we'll head for a pleasant little hotel close to the airport set amid gardens that attract many birds and butterflies and with luck we'll be there before dusk and have a chance to see our first wildlife.

Day 2

Carara National Park & Tarcoles River Boat Trip

It'll take us only an hour and a half to reach the Pacific lowlands and the fabulous Carara National Park. Carara protects a transition zone between the dry forests of Guanacaste and the tropical humid forests of Costa Rica's southern Pacific Coast. It is famous for having the largest remaining populations of Scarlet Macaws in the country and they are now very common, and loud! The iconic Guanacaste Tree *Enterolobium cyclocarpum* is quite common here and they are often full of birds. Straightaway the mesmerising colours of Costa Rica's birds will be evident. Here are Fiery-billed Araçari, White-necked Jacobin, Black-throated Trogon and Slaty-tailed Trogon. Iguanas sit in *Anacardium excelsum* trees, often several together looking very smart in green and orange. Laughing Falcon and Yellow-headed Caracara fly overhead as we get to grips with denizens of the undergrowth such as our first poison dart frogs and Streak-chested Antpitta. We'll look for White-whiskered Puffbird, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Great Tinamou and the gorgeous hummer Blue-throated Goldentail.

After lunch by the Tarcoles river we'll take a boat trip. The mangroves in the estuary are one of the best locations to see endangered birds such as the Mangrove Cuckoo, Mangrove Hummingbird, Mangrove Vireo and Panama Flycatcher whilst more common wetland birds such as Pelicans, Boat-billed Heron, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, White Ibis, Bare-throated Tiger-heron, American Purple Gallinule, Black Skimmer, Magnificent Frigatebird, Mangrove Warbler, Mangrove Black-Hawk and American Pygmy Kingfisher are everywhere. And what's so nice is how easy it is to get very close to them on the boat – it's a wonderful trip for wildlife photographers. We'll see plenty of American Crocodiles and Jesus Christ Lizards may well show you how they got their name. And we've a decent chance of seeing Crab-eating Raccoons among the mangroves.

In the later afternoon we'll travel further South, alongside the breathtaking Pacific Coast, before reaching the lovely Hacienda Baru.

Days 3 – 5(am)

Hacienda Baru Lodge and the Southern Central Pacific Coast

Hacienda Baru is an attractive little place nestled on the edge of an area of protected coastal rainforest, with a sweeping expanse of unspoilt sandy beach just ten minutes down the track. The gardens are full of birds and butterflies but it's once you are into the trails through the rainforest that the wildlife really starts to impress. Collared Peccaries saunter past as if the sight of a human was just a pleasant diversion on a day of rooting under the Pandanus. Agoutis crack nuts in plain sight and White-nosed Coatis are abundant and around. There's a great chance of finding both Northern Tamandua and Mexican Porcupine here too, and both Three-toed Sloths and Hoffman's Two-toed Sloths are common – both these are often around the lodge itself. The birdlife is mesmerizing. Small groups of Collared Aracaris and noisy Yellow-throated Toucans attract attention. Mornings and late afternoons parrots fly overhead including White-crowned, Red-ored and Mealy Parrots as well as Orange-chinned and Crimson-fronted Parakeets.

Along the shady trails we should find Slaty-tailed, Gartered and Black-throated Trogons. Another spectacular bird is Lesson's (formerly Blue-diademed) Motmot. Woodpeckers vary from the tiny Olivaceous Piculet through the local endemic Golden-naped Woodpecker, common Red-crowned Woodpecker and Black-cheeked Woodpecker, through to the decidedly large Lineated and Pale-billed Woodpeckers. Exciting are the moments when we bump into a large mixed feeding flock of antshrikes, antbirds, woodcreepers, spintails, flycatchers, vireos, warblers and many more. Black-hooded Antshrike and Chestnut-backed Antbird are very common, but we will also look for Great Antshrike, Barred Antshrike, Dusky Antbird and Zeledon's Antbird as well as Tawny-winged, Wedge-billed and Streak-headed Woodcreepers. Glorious little manakins are always a favourite and here we have Red-capped, Blue-crowned, Orange-collared and White-ruffed Manakins. There's several colourful Euphonias as well as Scarlet-rumped Cacique and Streak-backed Oriole. Flowering trees attract Bananaquit, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Green Honeycreeper and Blue Dacnis as well as Summer, Scarlet-rumped, Golden-hooded, Gray-headed and White-shouldered Tanagers.

On Day 4 there's an option to go on a whale and dolphin watching tour and visit Bahia Ballena National Park. Humpback Whales congregate in the waters off of Uvita at this season and we'll have a chance to get close to these charismatic animals. Dolphins are frequently observed on these trips too, mostly Pantropical Spotted Dolphins and Bottlenose Dolphins, but also sometimes Spinner Dolphins.

Days 5(pm) – 8(am)

The Talamanca Mountains & The Quetzal National Park

After breakfast on Day 5 we'll travel to the Sueños del Bosque, a Hotel that sits amid the cloudforests to the south of the Costa Rican capital high on the Pacific-facing slopes of the Cerro de la Muerte. Amongst some of Costa Rica's finest ethereal landscapes we can see Long-tailed Silky Flycatcher, Sulphur-winged Parakeets and the amazing Fiery-throated Hummingbird with its improbably iridescent throat – a kaleidoscope of colours as it turns its head this way and that. 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*. Aguacatillo 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! Hummingbird feeders attract the glorious Talamanca 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*. Amongst this unique vegetation we will find high mountain species like Timberline Wren, Black-and-Yellow Silky Flycatcher and Peg-billed Finch. It is also a good place to see the local form of Red-tailed Hawk and sometimes we see Baird's Tapir as well. The distinctive silhouette of the American Swallow-tailed Kite is frequently seen overhead, less often Ornate Hawk-Eagles.

Magnificent oak woodlands cover much of the valley around our hotel in San Gerardo de Dota. Many of these oaks are very old, and surprisingly huge, each covered in a veil of mosses, ferns and the like. Amongst them we'll find beautiful birds such as Flame-throated Warbler, Collared Whitestart and the lovely Golden-browed Chlorophonia. Torrent Tyrannulet is found along the picturesque river and in gardens alongside a whole suite of gorgeous hummers such as Lesser Violetear, Scintillant Hummingbird, and White-throated Mountain Gem. Large-footed Finch and Yellow-thighed Finch fossick under the shrubberies alongside Black-billed Nightingale Thrush and Ruddy-capped Nightingale Thrush. We'll hope to see the wonderful Blue-throated Toucanet, rare Black Guan, elusive Spotted Wood Quail, and a whole range of other unusual birds such as Sooty-capped Bush Tanager, Slaty Flowerpiercer, Ruddy Treerunner, Spotted Barbtail, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper and the gorgeous Flame-throated Warbler.

Day 8(pm) & 11(am)

Tapirus Lodge: Braulio Carillo National Park & La Selva Biological Station

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. We'll stay on the edge of this most biodiverse of national parks at the excellent Tapirus Lodge which has its own private 475 hectare reserve abutting Braulio Carillio. The impressive hanging baskets that are the nests of both Chestnut-headed & Montezuma Oropendulas are a notable sight in the tall trees close to Tapirus. Orange-chinned Parakeet, Brown-hooded Parrot, White-crowned Parrot, Red-lored and Mealy Amazon keep the skies noisy morning and evening and during the latter period we'll hear the strange calls of Pauraque along the track by the hotel, and perhaps Short-tailed Nighthawk too. Tapirs often visit the lodge in broad daylight! 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*, flashing blue *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 shimmering 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 Collared Trogon, Slaty-tailed Trogon and the lovely Broad-billed Motmot. We'll keep a careful lookout for the extraordinary Umbrellabird, a rare species (this is a good time of year to encounter them), and the immaculate Snowy Cotinga. The list of special birds goes on and on - Collared Forest Falcon, Vermiculated Screech Owl, Purple-crowned Fairy, White-whiskered Puffbird, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Collared Aracari, Rufous-winged Woodpecker, Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, Lineated and Pale-billed Woodpeckers, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Long-tailed Tyrant, White-collared Manakin, Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Band-backed Wren, Bay Wren, Golden-winged Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Bay-headed Tanager, Blue Dacnis, Black-faced Grosbeak and Scarlet-rumped Cacique.

We will visit the World-famous La Selva Biological Station which belongs to the Organization of Tropical Sciences. La Selva is one of Costa Rica's natural crown jewels. The Research Station pioneered private forest conservation in Costa Rica. The station's well-preserved old-growth and recovering wet lowland tropical forest abuts the Braulio Carrillo National Park. The 4 to 6 km wide forested corridor that connects La Selva at 35m above sea level to the Barva Volcano at 2,906m is one of the best-preserved elevational gradients in the tropics. The species richness of La Selva is outstanding, with more than two thousand species of plants; 125 species of mammal, 470 species of bird, 48 amphibian species, 87 species of reptile, and tens of thousands of insects, arachnids, and other arthropods. The forest here illustrates the principal of rarity common in Neotropical Forests whereby every tree in a particular area is different from all the others nearby. Except that is, almost half the large trees at La

Salva are impressive specimens of *Pentaclethra macroloba*. Almost all the other seven hundred species occur as very widely scattered individuals. The list of species is impressive – *Balizia elegans*, *Carapa nicaraguensis*, *Virola koschnyi*, *Vochysia ferruginea*, *Dipteryx panamensis*, *Inga alba*, *Welfia regia*, *Socratea exorrhiza*, *Ilex skutchii*, *Tapirira guianensis*, *Sacoglottis trichogyna*, *Tabernaemontana arborea*, *Jacaranda copaia* and *Handroanthus chrysanthus*. Spider Monkeys and in particular Howler Monkeys are common and easily seen here whilst Agoutis scurry about in the undergrowth. La Selva is famous for its population of the very rare Great Green Macaw. It is also a good spot to look for Tinamou species such as Great, Little and Slaty-breasted. Great Curassows strut around the facilities at the station as if they own it! As we stop to photograph the Green and Black Poison Dart Frogs, beautifully patterned tightly coiled Hog-nosed Pit-vipers may come into focus! We'll see *Norops* lizards and the bigger Central American Whiptails. 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 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 La Selva and Tapirus 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 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.

Day 11(pm)

Departure from San Jose

Day 12

Arrive UK/Europe

If you would like to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at enquiries@greentours.co.uk.

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