

Costa Rica

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly San José.
Day 2/3	Talamanca Mountains.
Day 4/6	Carara National Park.
Day 7/8	La Ensenada Wildlife Reserve.
Day 9/10	Arenal Volcano National Park.
Day 11/13	Sarapiquí & La Selva.
Day 14	San José.
Day 15	Depart San José.
Day 16	Arrive London.



Departs

January, February, March, April & November.

Focus

Birds (main focus), plus other wildlife.

Grading

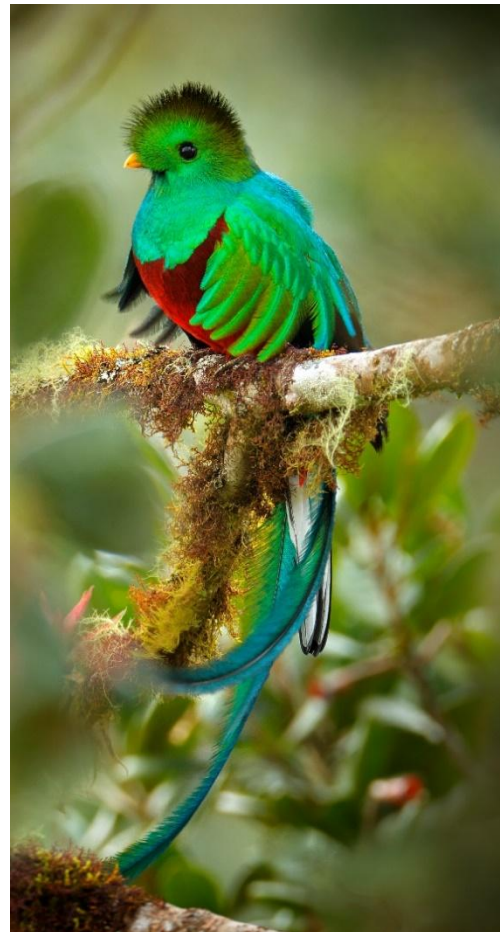
Grade A/B (see Page 6 for additional information).

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code CRI01).

Highlights

- Watch Resplendent Quetzal in the moss-draped cloudforests of the Talamanca Mountains
- Direct flights to San José with British Airways (November, January, February & March)
- Around 380 to 400 species of birds typically recorded!
- Including up to 30 species of hummingbird
- Explore the lowland rainforests of La Selva
- Spectacular scenery of Arenal Volcano National Park
- Explore the mangroves of Carara National Park
- Numerous colourful tanagers, New World warblers, toucans & motmots
- Led by expert local naturalist guides



Keel-billed Toucan & Resplendent Quetzal.



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Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

NB – We dropped Monteverde from all our Costa Rica tours in January 2018. The trails around Monteverde and Santa Elena have become increasingly busy over the past few years with other visitors and the birding has deteriorated. The Talamanca Mountains now offer a far more enjoyable (and less 'touristy') cloudforest experience than Monteverde and the time we used to spend in Monteverde is now better used elsewhere. Please call the Naturetrek office on 01962 733051 for further details.

Day 1

San José

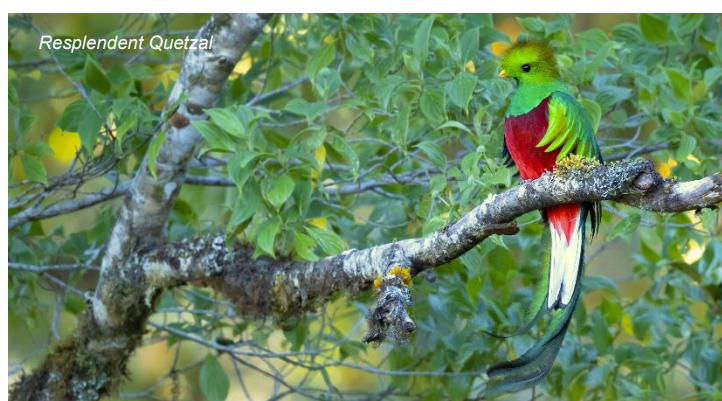
We depart mid-morning on a direct British Airways scheduled flight from London Heathrow bound for the Costa Rican capital, San José, arriving mid to late afternoon. Here we will meet our expert naturalist/birder guide and make the short drive into San José where we will spend the night at either the comfortable Hotel Bougainvillea or the Hotel Buena Vista.

Days 2 & 3

Talamanca Mountains

Following breakfast, and an early walk around the hotel grounds for those who wish, we will head east through San José and up into the moss-draped cloud forests of the Talamanca Mountains. The habitats we pass through as we drive into the highlands range from open farmland, through lush tropical forest and cloudforest, to páramo, and will provide an ideal opportunity to familiarise ourselves with many of the bird families we will be encountering during our stay in Costa Rica. Our journey to the highlands of Cerro de la Muerte will take us along the Pan-American highway which ascends gradually from about 1,800 metres in San José to around 3,300 metres (11,000 feet) at its highest point. In years gone by people struggled to keep warm on this pass, hence the name 'Mountain of Death!'

We will be based for two nights at either Saverge Mountain Hotel or the nearby El Trogon Lodge, both of which lie at an altitude of around 2,200 metres, close to a fast-flowing mountain stream and backed by forest. Hummingbirds and colourful flowers dot the grounds, a magnet for such species as Talamanca Hummingbird, White-throated Mountain-gem, Lesser Violetear and the tiny Volcano and Scintillant Hummingbirds. Within





Swallow-tailed Kite

mixed tanager and warbler flocks we should look for Spangled-cheeked Tanager, Flame-throated Warbler and Collared Whitestart, whilst other species to search for include Sooty Thrush, Torrent Tyrannulet, Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher, Acorn Woodpecker, Sulphur-winged Parakeet, Black-capped Flycatcher, Black-billed Nightingale-thrush, Timberline Wren, Rufous-collared Sparrow, Large-footed Finch, Yellow-thighed Brush-finch, Sooty-capped Chlorospingus, Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Black-thighed Grosbeak, Slaty Flower-piercer and

the graceful Swallow-tailed Kite. The cloudforests of the Talamanca Mountains are also home to the Resplendent Quetzal, a beautiful species of trogon that we will make a special effort to find.

If the weather permits we will venture up to 3,300 metres to explore the *parámo*, a habitat type more typically found in the high Andes of South America, which has a very limited and fragmented distribution in Costa Rica. A number of bird species inhabiting the *parámo* of Costa Rica and neighbouring Panama are found nowhere else, such as Volcano Junco and Peg-billed Finch.

Days 4 – 6

Carara National Park



Yellow-throated Toucan

Following breakfast, we will drive out of the mountains and then south-west to the lowland rainforests of Carara National Park. Carara supports one of the few areas of pristine lowland tropical forest left on the Pacific slope, and hosts a very large and diverse avifauna. Apart from lush evergreen forest, there are areas of secondary forest and scrub, wetlands, mudflats and mangrove thickets, each of which has its own range of species. The temperature and humidity at Carara will be much higher than we will have experienced in the mountains, and so we must pace

ourselves over the next couple of days and make full use of the cooler early morning and late afternoon hours.

It is in those first few hours after dawn that bird activity in the forest is at its most frenzied so we will make the most of this time by spending the mornings birding along the forest edge and slowly walking the trails. It will not be long before the temperature starts to rise and bird activity declines. When it does, we will move on to explore some of the other habitats in and around the reserve and probably retreat back to the lodge for a couple of hours siesta. Whilst birds will be our primary focus, we will not fail to be impressed by the diversity of butterflies and dragonflies we are likely to encounter - the morpho butterflies being the most impressive of the butterfly species we are likely to see. Mammals can be tricky to find in the rainforests, but careful searching may turn up a White-faced Capuchin or Central American Agouti.



Morpho

You will also embark a boat trip around the mangroves and mudflats of the Tarcoles Estuary (timing will depend on the tide). This is an excellent trip and offers the opportunity of seeing a wide variety of birds and the occasional mammal.



Scarlet Macaws

Some of the species to look out for during our time in and around Carara National Park include Great Tinamou, Boat-billed Heron, Tricoloured Heron, Roseate Spoonbill, Plumbeous Kite, Crested Caracara, Crested Guan, Northern Jacana, Wilson's (Thick-billed) Plover, Royal Tern, Scarlet Macaw, Orange-chinned Parakeet, Yellow-throated Toucan, Striped Cuckoo, Lesser Nighthawk, Costa Rican Swift, Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift, Long-billed Hermit, Violet Sabrewing, Green-breasted Mango, Blue-throated Goldentail, Blue-vented Hummingbird, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Black-headed Trogon, Baird's Trogon, White-whiskered Puffbird, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Black-hooded Antshrike, Dusky Antbird, Orange-collared Manakin, Long-tailed Manakin, Northern Royal-flycatcher, Golden-hooded Tanager, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, Philadelphia Vireo and White-throated Magpie-jay.

Having spent the day exploring the habitats in the reserve we will spend the late afternoon and evening strategically positioned to watch as Scarlet Macaws fly from the forest to their night-time roost. If we are lucky the birds will fly virtually overhead and provide a spectacular ending to a very exciting day.

N.B. Please be aware that the lodge we usually frequent for our time in and around Carara National Park, Villa Lapas, is being renovated in 2026 and is closing for the year. We are investigating alternatives of a similar standard and more details will be available soon.

Days 7 & 8

La Ensenada Wildlife Reserve



Red-legged Honeycreeper

Moving north along the coast we will spend two nights at La Ensenada Wildlife Reserve which sits adjacent to Palo Verde National Park, one of the most important wetland habitats in all of Costa Rica. Our base here will be the comfortable, but simple, La Ensenada Lodge and after lunch we will spend the rest of the afternoon exploring the varied habitats that surround it.

During our time at La Ensenada National Wildlife Refuge we will explore the wetlands and adjacent patches of dry forest home to numerous birds and troops of very vocal Mantled Howler Monkeys. The nearby Colorado Salinas are an excellent site for migrating waders and other waterbirds including Black Skimmer, Semipalmated, Least, Stilt and Western Sandpipers, Lesser Yellowlegs, Willet, Hudsonian and Marbled Godwits and Surf-bird. Mangrove Warblers and Prothonotary Warblers flit in the fringing mangrove thickets, whilst overhead flocks of menacing Magnificent Frigatebirds soar. Other species to look out for during our time at La Ensenada Lodge include Thicket Tinamou, Pied-billed Grebe, Least Bittern, Bare-throated Tiger-heron, Boat-billed Heron, Wood Stork, Jabiru, Roseate



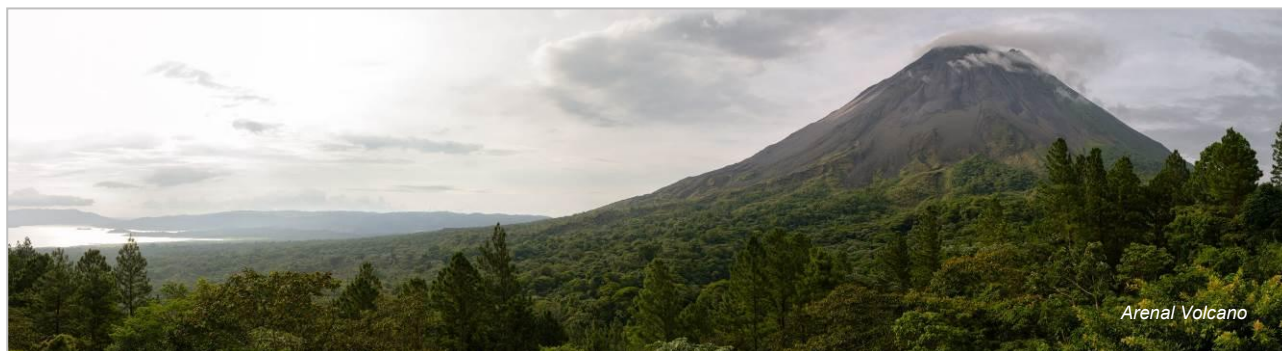
Prothonotary Warbler

Spoonbill, King Vulture, Hook-billed Kite, Short-tailed Hawk, Laughing Falcon, Collared Forest-falcon, Crested Guan, Spot-bellied Bobwhite, Limpkin, Sora, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Pectoral Sandpiper, Wilson's Phalarope, Franklin's Gull, Elegant Tern, Inca Dove, Mangrove Cuckoo, Lesser Ground-cuckoo, Spectacled Owl, Common Nighthawk, Common Pauraque, Green-breasted Mango, Mangrove Hummingbird, Blue-vented Hummingbird, Plain-capped Starthroat, Black-headed Trogon, Ringed Kingfisher, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Rose-throated Becard, Black-crowned Tityra, Long-tailed Manakin, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, White-throated Magpie-jay, Wood Thrush, Philadelphia Vireo, Yellow-green Vireo, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Rufous-capped Warbler, Streak-backed Oriole, Scrub Euphonia, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Scarlet Tanager, Greyish Saltator, Rose-breasted and Blue Grosbeak, Painted Bunting, Olive Sparrow and Stripe-headed Sparrow.

Day 9 & 10

Arenal Volcano National Park

Following breakfast, we will begin our journey across Costa Rica to the lush tropical forests of the Caribbean Lowlands. We will break our journey, however, with two nights at Arenal Observatory Lodge on the edge of the Arenal Volcano National Park. If the weather is clear, then the views of the volcano are breathtaking and the birding is first class too! Species to look out for include American Swallow-tailed Kite, Scarlet-rumped Tanager, Double-toothed Tanager, Bay-headed Tanager, Emerald Tanager, Tawny-capped Euphonia, Yellow-throated Toucan, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Long-tailed Hermit, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Green Thorntail, Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-winged Warbler and Giant Cowbird. A confiding troop of White-nosed Coatis are also frequent visitors to the lodge's well stocked bird tables and Northern Tamandua are seen from time to time too.



Days 11 – 13

Sarapiquí & La Selva

Continuing on we will complete our drive into the forests of the Caribbean lowlands to Selva Verde Lodge, arriving in time for lunch. Selva Verde translates into English as 'Green Forest', an apt name since it is located on the edge of a tract of pristine lowland tropical rainforest adjacent to the Sarapiquí River. The lodge itself has its own private area of virgin forest and rich secondary growth habitats extending to about 200 hectares. During our time here we will explore the numerous trails at Selva Verde which will provide us with an excellent opportunity to seek out some of the often skulking forest-dwellers such as manakins, antbirds, jacamars, motmots and woodcreepers. We can also hope to see a good number of waterbirds, including up to five species of kingfisher and many herons and egrets (the elusive Fasciated Tiger-heron is even a possibility). There will also be a chance of seeing Sungrebe and

the stunning Sunbittern, not to mention the many other bird species, as well as mammals such as Three-toed Sloths, that inhabit the forest along the riverbanks.

We will be spending a full day (returning to Selva Verde for lunch) at the well-known La Selva Biological Station run by the Organisation for Tropical Studies (OTS). La Selva was acquired by the OTS in 1960 and is today principally used for biological research, education and studies into the sustainable use of tropical forests. There is a good network of trails which meander through the 1,500-hectare reserve providing an excellent opportunity to observe birds in a range of habitats. Besides primary lowland tropical forest, there are areas of swamp, pasture, agricultural land, rivers and creeks and secondary forests in various stages of development. Over 400 species of birds, 100 species of mammals, and 2,000 species of plant have been recorded at La Selva; with such great diversity we have a very good chance of amassing an impressive selection of birds, many of which we will not have seen previously.



Strawberry Poison Dart Frog



Montezuma's Oropendola

Species to look out for include Great and Little Tinamous, Great Curassow, Semi-plumbeous Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Sungrebe, Band-tailed Barbthroat, Long-tailed Hermit, White-necked Jacobin, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Blue-chested Hummingbird, Violaceous Trogon, Rufous-capped Motmot, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Lineated Woodpecker, Cinnamon Woodpecker, Great Green Macaw, Snowy Cotinga, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, White-collared Manakin, Red-capped Manakin, Black-capped Pygmy-tyrant, Great Ant-Shrike, Dusky-

facéd Tanager, Red-throated Ant-tanager, Yellow-crowned Euphonia, Golden-hooded Tanager, Green Honeycreeper, Hooded Warbler, Chestnut-headed Oropendola and many many more!

On another day we will visit the forests around 'Virgin de Socorro', a journey of around 45 minutes from Selva Verde Lodge. Virgin de Socorro lies on the Caribbean Slopes and is a wonderful area for birds and other wildlife. Species to look out for include Golden-winged Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Long-billed Gnatwren, Shining Honeycreeper, Bright-rumped Atilla and White Hawk.

NB - In the event of Naturetrek not being able to secure enough rooms at Selva Verde Lodge our group will stay at the nearby Sueno Azul Lodge. Both lodges are of a very similar standard with extensive grounds and equally convenient for excursions to La Selva, Virgin de Socorro and elsewhere.

Day 14

San Jose

We will have a few hours this morning to take one last look around the hotel grounds before beginning our drive back to San Jose. En route we will stop at Cope's Gardens, a small private reserve home to a wide variety of rainforest birds and includes several hummingbirds such species as White-necked Jacobin and Long-billed Hermit, amongst others. Later in the afternoon we will arrive back at San Jose for our final night in Costa Rica. Here we say goodbye to our local naturalist guide and check-in at either the Hotel Bougainvillea or the Hotel Buena Vista.



Day 15

Depart San Jose

This morning is free to relax or explore the hotel grounds. Around early-afternoon we will be transferred back to San Jose Airport in time to catch our early to mid-afternoon direct British Airways flight to London's Gatwick Airport.

Day 16

London

We are due to arrive back in London's Gatwick Airport mid-morning.

Grading & Focus

Grade A/B. This is a traditional birding and wildlife tour with leisurely walks over mostly easy terrain. Some of the trails, however, can be steep, criss-crossed by roots and muddy in places – especially in the Talamanca Mountains and Arenal National Park – and it will be hot and humid in the lowlands which makes walking tiring. This holiday is best suited, therefore, for those with an average level of fitness who enjoy walking. Since wildlife activity is at its best during the first few hours of daylight, dawn starts will be encouraged!

All of our Costa Rica tours are general wildlife holidays, but with a particular focus on the country's abundant birdlife. Whilst those joining this tour do not need to be an expert ornithologist, a keen interest in birds and birdwatching is required to get the most out of the holiday. Please be aware that, being a primarily forested country, mammals can be a challenge to find (many are also nocturnal), although our groups still regularly see primates, sloths, coatis and others. Your guides will also be happy to point out the other wildlife you encounter such as the insects, reptiles and amphibians etc, but will not necessarily be able to put a name to all of them.

Weather

Costa Rica has a very varied climate considering its small size. Temperature variation is more to do with altitude rather than the time of the year and you will need to be prepared for hot and humid conditions in the tropical forests of the lowlands, with midday temperatures into the 30s degrees C, and the possibility of an early morning

frost whilst exploring the Talamanca Mountains! The dry season usually runs from December through to April and the wetter months from May to October.

By November the rains are petering out (the wettest months in the centre and west of the country being May, June, September and October). Even during the dry season, however, you should still expect – and pack for – some rain, especially in the mountains.

Guiding

This tour will be led by a local, English speaking, expert naturalist/birder guide who will meet the group in San Jose Airport on Day 1 and leave once the group arrive back into San Jose on the evening of Day 14. For additional information on our team of Costa Rican guides please give the Naturetrek office a call on 01962 733051.

Please note that we do not provide a trip report at the end of our locally led Costa Rica tours, although your guide will run through the checklist each evening so group members can keep a record of the birds, mammals and other wildlife that has been seen.

Food and accommodation included in the price

All meals and accommodation are included in the tour price with the exception of dinner on Day 1 and lunch on Day 15. The lodges and hotels we use on this tour are comfortable (not luxurious) and located in excellent locations for birds and other wildlife. All rooms have private facilities and a limited number of rooms are available for single occupancy at the supplement cost outlined on our website and brochure.

Please also note that the accommodation outlined above may, very occasionally, need to be amended. Replacement lodges and hotels will always be of the same standard as the ones outlined in the itinerary and will in no way affect your holiday. Should we have to implement any changes to the above we will notify you as soon as possible.

NB - Depending on the availability of rooms at our chosen lodges we may opt to reverse the itinerary of one or more of our Costa Rica tours to start in Sarapiquí and end in the Talamanca Mountains. The group will spend the same number of nights in each venue as outlined above and, as such, the change will in no way affect the wildlife content of the tour. For further information please call 01962 733051 or email info@naturetrek.co.uk

Flights

British Airways fly direct between London's Gatwick Airport and the Costa Rican capital, San Jose, from early November to the end of March. During these months we use BA's direct flights for all of our groups to Costa Rica (subject to seat availability). Outside these months there are no direct flights from the UK to San Jose and so our groups usually travel with either Iberia Airlines (via Madrid) or Air France (via Paris).

Extra expenses

Drinks, tips (please allow around £150 for tips), laundry, airport tax, and all items of a personal nature are not included in the cost of the holiday. The evening meal on Day 1 and lunch on Day 15 are also excluded from the tour cost.

Your safety & security

Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the FCDO website – www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/costa-rica or telephone 0870 6060290 prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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