

Costa Rica – From Coast to Cloudforest

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	<u>Fly San José and overnight.</u>
Day 2/4	<u>Tortuguero National Park.</u>
Day 5/6	<u>Sarapiquí and La Selva.</u>
Day 7/8	<u>Talamanca Mountains.</u>
Day 9	<u>San José.</u>
Day 10	<u>Depart San José.</u>
Day 11	<u>Arrive London.</u>

Departs

March and April.

Focus

Birds, mammals and other wildlife.

Grading

Grade A/B (see Page 4 for additional information).

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code CRI04).

Highlights:

- Look for Resplendent Quetzals in the cloudforests of the Talamanca Mountains.
- Explore the lowland rainforests of Tortuguero National Park by boat & on foot.
- Numerous colourful tanagers, trogons, hummingbirds, toucans & motmots.
- Wander the lowland rainforests of La Selva, one of the biologically richest reserves in the country.
- Mammals including Mantled Howler Monkey, Geoffroy's Spider Monkey & perhaps Northern Tamandua.
- Direct flights from London's Gatwick Airport.
- Small group of only 10 people.
- Led by an expert naturalist guide.



Resplendent Quetzal (Shutterstock Ltd)



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Introduction

On the 18th September 1502, on his final voyage to the New World, Christopher Columbus landed on a rainforest-edged sandy beach on the shores of the Caribbean. He, and the conquistadors who came after him, were so dazzled by the gold jewellery worn by the native peoples that they christened this new land ‘Costa Rica’, Spanish for ‘rich coast’. Although these early explorers failed to find the golden cities they had dreamed of, today this beautiful Central American country offers wealth of a different kind to those who visit its shores and, for the naturalist, Costa Rica’s riches lie in its wonderful diversity of wildlife.

Occupying just 0.1% of the world’s landmass, this little country contains 5% of its biodiversity! And there are good reasons for this superb richness of fauna and flora. Costa Rica lies within the tropics, the most ecologically diverse region of our planet. Furthermore, one quarter of the country has been protected within national parks and reserves (the largest percentage in the world) and its topography is incredibly varied, ranging from lush lowland rainforests on both Caribbean and Pacific coastlines to the moss-draped cloudforests and high volcanic peaks of the interior. On this exciting tour we will go in search of this abundance of wildlife, focusing in particular on the birdlife of the Talamanca Mountains to the south of San José and the forests, waterways and coastal mangroves of Tortuguero National Park and the Caribbean Lowlands.

Itinerary

NB. 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.

Day 1

San José

We depart this morning on British Airways’ direct flight from London’s Gatwick Airport to the Costa Rican capital, San José, arriving during the evening. Having collected our luggage we will make the short drive into San José where we will spend the night at a comfortable hotel.

Day 2 - 4

Tortuguero National Park



This morning we drive to Caño Blanco (a journey of around 3 to 4 hours) where we board a boat for the two hour journey along rainforest-lined canals and waterways into the heart of Tortuguero National Park, a remote wildlife haven covering over 310 square kilometres only accessible by water or air. Here we will be based for 3 nights at Laguna Lodge, a comfortable ecolodge tucked onto a peninsula between Laguna Tortuguero and the Caribbean Sea. Over 370 species of bird have been recorded in Tortuguero National Park, plus 57 species of amphibian, 60 species of mammal and a staggering 400 species of tree! We will explore the reserve by boat and on foot over the coming days in search of the abundance of birds and other wildlife that lives here, including Sun Grebe, Agami Heron, American Pygmy Kingfisher, Keel-billed Toucan, Collared Aracari, Mantled Howler Monkey, Geoffroy’s Spider Monkey, White-faced Capuchin and the rare American Crocodile.



The programme for each of our days in Tortuguero National park will follow a similar pattern. Shortly after sunrise we will take a pre-breakfast boat trip along the Tortuguero canals retuning for breakfast around 0730 hours. We will head out by boat once again after breakfast and then, after returning to the lodge for lunch and a siesta, take a final boat trip (or perhaps a forest walk) late in the afternoon once the heat of the day has subsided.

Day 5 - 6

Sarapiquí & La Selva

This morning we will take the two hour boat trip back to Cano Blanco and transfer to Selva Verde Lodge. The lodge is located within a tract of pristine lowland tropical rainforest and during our time here we will explore the trails that radiate out from its luxuriant grounds. These 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 5 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 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.

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

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 7 - 8

Talamanca Mountains



Long-tailed Silky Flycatcher

Following breakfast, and an early walk around the lodge grounds for those who wish, we will head back to San Jose and then up into the moss-draped cloudforests 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 *parámo*, and the drop in temperature will make a pleasant change from the heat and humidity of the lowlands. 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 Suria Mountain Lodge, both of which lie at an altitude of around 2,200 metres, close to a fast flowing mountain stream and backed by forest. Hummingbird feeders and colourful flowers dot the grounds, a magnet for such species as Magnificent Hummingbird, White-throated Mountain-gem, Green Violetear and the tiny Volcano and Scintillant Hummingbirds. Within 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 Robin, 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 Finch, Sooty-capped Bush-tanager, Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Black-thighed Grosbeak, Slaty Flower-piercer and the beautiful 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!



Fiery-throated Hummingbird

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.

Day 9

San Jose

We will spend most of today further exploring the cloudforests and enjoying the colourful birdlife that lives here. Later in the afternoon we will drive back to San Jose for our final night in Costa Rica.

Day 10

Depart San Jose

This morning you are free to relax and explore the hotel grounds before transferring back to the airport around lunchtime in time to catch our mid-afternoon direct British Airways flight to London's Gatwick Airport.

Day 11

London

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

Grading

Grade A. This is a traditional birding and wildlife tour with no strenuous walking involved. Some of the trails, however, can be steep and muddy in places (especially in the Talamanca Mountains) and it will be hot and humid in the lowlands. 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!

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 November. Even during the dry season, however, you should still expect - and pack for - the occasional rain shower, especially in the mountains.

Food and accommodation included in the price

All meals and accommodation are included in the tour price. 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 single accommodation is available 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.

Extra expenses

Drinks, tips, laundry, locally paid airport tax, and all items of a personal nature are not included in the cost of the holiday. Please allow around US\$100 for tips.

Guiding

This tour will be led by a local, English speaking, expert naturalist/birder guide who will meet the group in San Jose Airport. 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.

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 and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office 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 or book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk. Alternatively please 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.

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