

Costa Rica – A Wildlife Photography Tour

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	San José.
Day 2/3	Arenal Volcano National Park.
Day 4/6	Laguna de Lagarto Lodge.
Day 7/10	Sarapiquí & La Selva.
Day 11/13	Talamanca Mountains.
Day 14	San José.
Day 15	Depart San José.
Day 16	Arrive London.

Departs

March/April.

Focus

Wildlife Photography.

Grading

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

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code CRI06).

Highlights

- Led by an expert wildlife photographer
- Hummingbirds, toucans, tanagers, motmots, trogons and others
- Use of feeding stations, designed to maximise photographic opportunities
- Visit the King Vulture photography hide
- Explore the rainforests around La Selva
- A relaxed-paced itinerary focusing on several of Costa Rica's finest wildlife reserves
- Look for the Resplendent Quetzal, often touted as the most beautiful bird in the world!
- Accompanied by expert local naturalist guide



Keel-billed Toucan & Resplendent Quetzal. Images courtesy of Eduardo Rivero.



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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 early-morning on an Air France or Iberia Airlines scheduled flight from London Heathrow bound for the Costa Rican capital, San José, via a change of aircraft in either Paris or Madrid. On arrival we will make the short drive into San José where we will spend the night at either the comfortable Hotel Bougainvillea or the Hotel Buena Vista.

Day 2 & 3

Arenal Volcano National Park

Following breakfast, we will leave San Jose and head north to the comfortable Arenal Observatory Lodge on the edge of the Arenal Volcano National Park, a journey of around three hours. If the weather is clear then the views of the volcano are breathtaking and the photography at this venue is first class too! The lodge has several bird feeders on which they place fruit each morning. These attract a wide variety of species ranging from flocks of the turkey-sized Great Curassow to small iridescent honeycreepers. A confiding troop of White-nosed Coatis are also frequent visitors to the lodge's feeders and the occasional Northern Tamandua (an endearing small anteater) are seen here from time to time too.

Other species to look out for as we wander the trails include American Swallow-tailed Kite, Passerini's Tanager, Hepatic Tanager, Bay-headed Tanager, Emerald Tanager, Tawny-capped Euphonia, Black-mandibled Toucan, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Long-tailed Hermit, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Green Thorntail, Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-winged Warbler and Giant Cowbird. Although the lodge does not have any hummingbird feeders, they have planted banks of hummingbird-friendly flowers which offer a more natural background for those keen on getting shots of these colourful sprites.



Day 4 – 6

Laguna de Lagarto Lodge



Mantled Howler Monkey

After breakfast we will drive north-west to spend the next three nights at Laguna de Lagarto Lodge. This delightful eco-lodge, which is located near the Rio San Carlos, lies within 500 hectares of unspoiled tropical rainforest and is home to a wonderful abundance of birds and other wildlife. Hummingbirds dot the grounds, a magnet for such species as Long-billed Hermit, White-necked Jacobin, Violet-crowned Woodnymph and the more widespread Rufous-tailed Hummingbird. Mixed flocks of passerines include Palm Tanager, Tawny-crested Tanager, Black-and-white Warbler and various flycatchers and antbirds,

whilst other species to look out for include Spotted Sandpiper, Agami Heron, White-throated Crake, Central American Pygmy Owl, Green Kingfisher, Shining Honeycreeper, White-collared Seedeater, Pied Puffbird, Keel-billed Toucan, Lineated Woodpecker and White-collared Swift. The forests around the lodge are also home to several pairs of the rare Great Green Macaw.

Laguna de Lagarto Lodge is popular with photographers. Specially constructed photography platforms and hides – including a King Vulture hide – will allow us to make the most of our time here.

For those with more diverse photographic interests, a search amongst the vegetation is likely to yield a selection of colourful frogs and a myriad of fascinating insects, while along the river's edge we hope to photograph the local caiman and basilisk lizards, the latter famed for their ability to run at speed across the surface of the water. Capturing this unique talent on film, however, may prove to be quite a challenge!



Green Kingfisher

The forests surrounding the lodge are also home to an interesting variety of mammals including Mantled Howler Monkey, White-face Capuchin and Central American Spider Monkey. The delightful Northern Tamandua is also seen from time to time.

Day 7 – 10

Sarapiquí & La Selva



Sunbittern

This morning we will make our way into the forests of the Caribbean lowlands, to Selva Verde Lodge, where we will be based for the next four nights. The lodge has its own private area of forest and rich secondary growth habitats extending to about 200 hectares. During our time here we will explore the numerous trails that radiate out from the lodge 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 and photograph 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 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 at least one full day (perhaps more) 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 of wildlife on offer we will have plenty of photographic subjects to choose from!



Species to look out for include Great and Little Tinamous, Great Curassow, Semi-plumbeous Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Sungrebe, Band-tailed Barbthroat, Long-billed Hermit, White-necked Jacobin, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Blue-chested Hummingbird, Gartered Trogon, Rufous 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, Hooded Warbler, Chestnut-headed Oropendola and many many more!

Days 11 – 13

Talamanca Mountains



Following breakfast, and an early walk around the hotel grounds for those who wish, we will head south back to San Jose and then up into the Talamanca Mountains, a journey of around four hours or so. 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 observe a range of Costa Rica's familiar roadside birds. Once past San Jose, our journey to the highlands of Cerro de la Muerte will take us along the Pan-American highway

which ascends from about 1,800 metres in then capital 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 three nights at Saverge Mountain Hotel, a lovely lodge which lies at an altitude of around 2,200 metres, on the edge of a fast flowing mountain stream and backed by forest. Hummingbirds 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 and photograph.

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 14

San Jose

This morning, after a final morning photography session in the surroundings of Savegre Mountain Hotel, we will return to San Jose later in the afternoon for a final night at the Hotel Bougainvillea or Hotel Buena Vista.

Day 15

Depart San Jose

This morning is free to relax or explore the hotel grounds. In the early afternoon we will transfer back to San Jose Airport in time to catch our late-afternoon flight home (via either Paris or Madrid).

Day 16

London

We are due to arrive back in London mid-morning.

Tour Grading

Grade A/B. This is a straightforward photography 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 it will be hot and humid in the lowlands which makes walking tiring, especially when carrying heavy photographic equipment. This holiday is best suited, therefore, for those with a reasonable 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.

Guiding

This tour will be led by an expert wildlife photographer who will accompany the group from the UK. Please refer to the Naturetrek website for the name of the leader and his/her biography.

The group will also be joined 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 Day 14.

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 and dinner 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 in our 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, airport tax, and all items of a personal nature are not included in the cost of the holiday. Please allow around £150.00 for tips and US\$30.00 for departure tax at San Jose airport (included by most airlines these days). The evening meal on Day 1 and lunch and dinner on Day 15.

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, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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