

WILDLIFE TRAVEL



1st to 16th March 2018 (16 days)

COSTA RICA

Easy birding and natural history

"It exceeded all expectations"

Costa Rica 2013

From the western Pacific habitats to the eastern Caribbean slope, this holiday is a perfect introduction to the Tropics, exploring Costa Rica's exciting landscapes and bird life.

Costa Rica is a natural history paradise, as discovered by those who travelled with us on our four previous visits to this biodiverse country, where a high percentage of the land is managed for conservation. The wildlife in the tropics will captivate both the new and the more seasoned traveller as we explore coastal forests and mangroves, cloud forests, rain forests and dramatic volcanic cones. Visiting national parks and reserves, we pass through several different regions. As we travel we will also find out about the ecology, agriculture, and the culture and history of Costa Rica. Accommodation is mostly at attractive lodges and our travel is at a comfortable pace, by coach and boat.

We begin at Poas Volcano where there are spectacular tropical rainforests and beautiful waterfalls. Moving to the Talamanca mountains, we explore high cloud forest with a chance to see the Resplendent Quetzal! We then move to La Ensenada Wildlife Refuge set amongst the dry forests of the Pacific coast, before exploring the Arenal N.P. and visiting this famous volcanic area. At Caño Negro we will travel by boat, looking for monkeys and forest birds along the banks of the Rio Frio. At La Selva Biological Station in the Caribbean lowlands we join local conservationists to gain an insight into conservation work in the Tropics. The exciting Tortuguero National Park on the Caribbean coast is not accessible by road but, travelling by boat to our lodge, we have a wonderful tour through the waterways. Walks on easy trails will give us many chances to see howler monkeys, fruit-eating bats, poison-dart frogs, and many tropical plants.



Price
£4450

Single Room Supplement
£320

Full board

- Day 1** flight to San Jose
- Day 2** Volcan Poas
- Day 3** Talamanca Mntns
- Day 4** Los Quetzales NP
- Day 5** Tarcoles River
- Day 6** La Ensenada
- Day 7** Arenal volcano area
- Day 8** Rio Frio, Cano Negro
- Day 9** Arenal
- Day 10** Sarapiquí area
- Day 11** La Selva
- Day 12-13** Tortuguero
- Day 14** return to San Jose
- Day 15** San Jose, departure
- Day 16** arrive UK

Leaders

Philip Precey and
Adolfo Downs Valle

tropical forests, natural
history, easy birding

Wildlife and culture holidays



Our profits are donated to the **Wildlife Trusts**



Focus of Interest

Our itinerary is planned to provide a **range of wildlife experiences**, particularly for seeing **birds and other animals** but, as we pass through the different regions, we will see much of the native vegetation and enjoy some **wonderful tropical plants**. As we travel, we will see something of the country's interesting culture and history as well as its wildlife. Although we cannot always guarantee the wildlife on our trips, in Costa Rica we can certainly say that you will see plenty - frogs, caimans, lizards, sloths and birds are everywhere!

The Wildlife of Costa Rica

Costa Rica offers the opportunity to see a wealth of neotropical wildlife. Our tour takes in a variety of extremely rich habitats where we should find birds in profusion as well as mammals such as sloth, spider monkeys and howler monkeys, and reptiles including caiman, American crocodile and various large, colourful iguanas and basilisks. Costa Rica is home to over 1200 species of butterfly.

Most dramatic are the huge, iridescent blue morphos, and the equally large owl butterfly with its defensive "eyes" on the wings. The forests are home to a huge range of bird species, including many of the conspicuous tropical classics such as parrots and toucans. Some of these visit bird tables and feeders at the lodges. More elusive, but equally colourful, are the trogons, motmots and the local speciality, the Resplendent Quetzal, which spend much time sitting quietly in the canopy waiting for food to pass by within easy reach. Scarlet and Great Green Macaws can also be found in Costa Rica - they can be elusive but we will keep on the look out for them.

A particular phenomenon in these tropical forests is the gathering of birds into large and extremely mixed foraging parties, with different species exploiting every habitat niche from ground level to the highest canopy. The forest can be still and almost silent until one of these flocks passes through, when it suddenly becomes difficult to know which way to look as perhaps twenty species appear at the same time, with tanagers, toucans, honeycreepers, woodpeckers, warblers, flycatchers and a host of others. Safety in numbers for the birds, but exciting confusion for the observer! Our expert local guides can prove to be extremely handy! Hummingbirds are another characteristic group, and we have seen many species on previous visits. Good views should be possible as they are readily attracted to nectar feeders at the lodges.

Travelling along the watercourses by boat we should encounter many herons and egrets in various colours and sizes from the Great Blue Heron and Great Egret down to tiger-herons, Green Heron and perhaps the unusual Boat-billed Heron. Ringed Kingfisher (the size of a crow) and several of its smaller relatives are also possible.



Leaders

Our leader for this trip is **Philip Precey**. Philip is a **Director of Wildlife Travel**, having joined Wildlife Travel in September 2007 from Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, where he worked on wetland conservation for 6 years. A keen all round naturalist, he has led previous Wildlife Travel holidays from Norfolk and the Isles of Scilly to Tasmania and Tanzania, including previous South American trips to Ecuador, Chile and Brazil. Never to be found far from his binoculars, Philip's all round natural history knowledge will ensure you get the most from your trip.

Our Costa Rican ornithologist/naturalist leader, **Adolfo Downs Valle**, is an experienced guide specialising in the ecology of tropical rainforests who has worked as a Field Research Assistant at La Selva Biological Station, involved in the collection of data on forest structure and bird nesting. Adolfo has led our previous nine trips to the country and his excellent bird knowledge and birding skills, as well as his keenness to share his enthusiasm for exploring his country, add greatly to the trip.



Eco tourism

Eco tourism in Costa Rica is the most important income for the country, especially since 1987 when the former President Oscar Arias won the Nobel Peace Prize and many initiatives started. Well-organised 'ecotourism' has proved to be vital in supporting wildlife conservation. On our trip, as well as visiting many of the areas important for conservation, we will support local guides involved in conservation who can tell us about important local projects - particularly the recording of the country's biodiversity. Neblina Forest, our local guiding company, supports conservation projects, particularly those protecting important forest areas in the neotropics.



ITINERARY

Please note that we may change the itinerary to suit local weather and road conditions or for other practical reasons, at the leader and guide's discretion

Day 1 Thursday 1st March Morning flight from UK to **San Jose**, arriving Santamaria International airport in the late afternoon. Transfer to **Hotel Robledal**, San Jose (2 nights).

Day 2 Fri 2nd We visit **Poas Volcano** enjoying the wonderful view of one of the most accessible volcanoes in the country. The access to the crater is about 30 minutes slow walking from the main entrance. We will also visit the Botos Lagoon. We then go to La Paz Waterfall which is located in the cloud forest of the Caribbean slope, where we will see many hummingbirds and tanagers coming to the feeders. Night at **Hotel Robledal**.

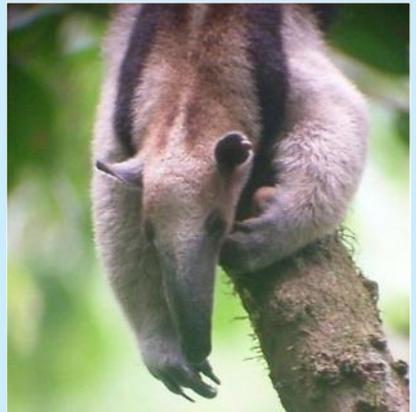
Day 3 Sat 3rd Today we head off to the area of San Gerardo de Dota, a small community in the middle elevations (2000m–2200m) of the **Talamanca Mountains**. We travel through deep cloud forest filled with huge oaks and other native species, stopping along the way to watch hummingbirds and to look for the 'most beautiful' bird of the Americas, the Resplendent Quetzal! We arrive at the attractive lodge, in an area famous for its birdlife, in the afternoon. Night at **Trogon Lodge** (2 nights).

Day 4 Sun 4th We travel higher, to the paramo habitat of **Cerro de la Muerte** (approx. 3100m). We will explore part of the famous **Los Quetzales N.P.** which includes parts of the Savegre River, an area rich in birdlife. Overnight at **Trogon Lodge**.

Day 5 Mon 5th We travel to the sunny Central Pacific area, stopping en route for a **boat trip on the Tarcoles River**. The dry forest in this area is a wonderful contrast to the cloud forest and has a very different set of species. We will watch the sunset over the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Nicoya, with frigatebirds, pelicans and macaws flying to their roosts in the evening light. Night at **Ensenada Lodge** (2 nights).

Day 6 Tue 6th We will spend all of today exploring the reserve that surrounds our lodge, **La Ensenada Wildlife Refuge**. We will spend our time in the unique and endangered dry forest, home to White-throated Magpie Jay, White-fronted Parrot and Turquoise-browed Motmot amongst others. We will also go on a tractor ride through the reserve to find shorebirds at the salt ponds and wetlands; a variety of sandpipers, plovers, White Ibis and Roseate Spoonbill should all be possible. Night at **Ensenada Lodge**.

Day 7 Wed 7th Transfer from the central Pacific area to the northern area of the country. The landscape around the Arenal Volcano is picturesque, surrounded by rain forest and orchards of pineapple and papaya. After checking in at our hotel we should also have time to visit the botanical garden and butterfly house nearby. o/n **Hotel Tilajari** (3 nights).



Day 8 Thu 8th Today we head out to **Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge**, where we will go on two river boat safaris along the Rio Frio. We will have great and close up views of birds and reptiles found along the river and, with luck, we may find all three species of monkey in the area. Night at **Hotel Tilajari**

Day 9 Fri 9th We will spend all day in the **Arenal National Park**, walking the 'lava flow' trail and a second, easy trail around the lake, looking for howler monkeys, Great Curassow, Keel-billed Toucan and many other species. Night at **Hotel Tilajari**.

Day 10 Sat 10th We transfer to the lowlands of the Caribbean side of the country in the **Sarapiquí region** - rainforest, beautiful rivers, and many birds. We will visit a local farm that grows medicinal plants for a short tour. Our wonderful lodge is in the rain forest and has excellent views of the Puerto Viejo River and nearby lagoons, with gardens full of flowers, amphibians and birds. Night at **Sueno Azul Resort** (2 nights).

Day 11 Sun 11th Full day at **La Selva Biological Station**. Operated by the Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS), this reserve has wonderful trails and canopy walkways through stands of giant trees giving excellent views of birds, orchids and many other plants that grow high up in the forest. Here we will be find out more about the research being carried out here, at one of the most famous places for tropical research studies in the world. We may be lucky enough to see local mammals such as agouti, peccaries and coati. Night at **Sueno Azul Resort**.

Day 12 Mon 12th After breakfast, we travel to the fabulous **Tortuguero National Park** on the Caribbean coast, which can be reached only by boat or plane. Near the mouth of the Parismina River we will meet our boat that will be our transport through the Tortuguero canals. We plan to arrive in time for lunch, visiting the nearby village in the afternoon to experience the local lifestyle. After dinner, we will take a guided night walk through the lodge grounds. Night at **La Baula Lodge (2 nights), Tortuguero**.

Day 13 Tue 13th Today we will take **boat trips** along the canals to look for otters, turtles and various species of herons and kingfishers. We will also explore the trails - with a good chance of finding animals such as howler, white-faced capuchin and spider monkeys, poison-dart frogs, caiman and many different plants. Night at **La Baula Lodge, Tortuguero**.

Day 14 Wed 14th We again **travel by boat** through the canals, exploring the riverside habitat on the way. We then continue to **San Jose** in our bus. The fields and palm forests on the route can be very good for herons and many other birds. Night in **Hotel Robledal**

Day 15 Thu 15th The chance for some sightseeing before our flights back to Europe, arriving **Day 16 Friday 16th March**





Accommodation, meals and transport

All of the lodges and hotels are of a very good standard, some with very attractive settings and all with very good meals. All the rooms have private bathrooms with hot water and are either air-conditioned or have ceiling fans where needed. Some lodges may have a swimming pool available. Single rooms are available in all locations. The exact lodge or hotel used may be changed if any local conditions change or if we feel a different choice would suit our needs better.

All meals are included - we will be lunching in cafés/restaurants or at our hotels although we may take a picnic on some days if needed.

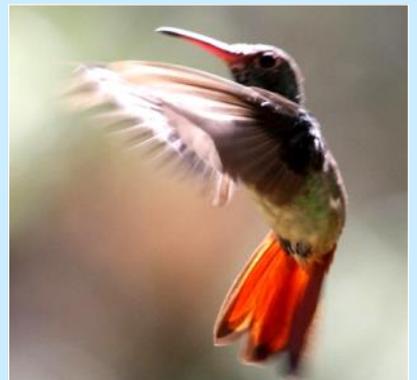
We will ensure that our travelling is as comfortable as possible. There will be days when we are transferring from one area to another where the journey may take much of the day but we will take plenty of stops for comfort breaks and to enjoy interesting areas. Some journeys will be made by boat (to Tortuguero).

Weather and seasons

We will be travelling in the dry season making travelling easier and with less likelihood of rain in some areas.

In the lowland rainforest of the Caribbean side, a number of plant species are in flower at any one time, depending on local climate patterns, and this area, and the mountains, can be visited at any time of year to see a good variety of birds, other animals and plants. March is a good time of year to visit the drier Pacific coast.

In the lowlands, particularly on the coast, it can be humid and relatively hot but we will adapt our plans to the temperatures. The cloud forest is, effectively, a higher altitude rain forest and we can expect generally cooler weather with, perhaps, some showers.



Fitness and health

- No strenuous walking is involved but you need to have a **reasonable level of general fitness** to be able to participate in the holiday. The tour visits several locations and travelling in the tropics can be tiring if you are not used to it. However, the trip is designed to be relatively comfortable so please discuss any concerns with us.
- Although most of the walks are not long, we will sometimes be walking on **rough or wet ground**. Walking boots (lightweight ok) are essential for most areas. There are a few occasions when we walk uphill but this is not excessive.
- The highest altitude will be c 3100m at Cerro de la Muerte (the lodge is at a lower elevation). There is some risk of altitude sickness although rest and drinking plenty of water usually relieve any mild effects (headaches and tiredness). If you have suffered from altitude problems before or are suffering from any medical condition, you should take your doctor's advice. We will be taking it easy at these higher altitudes and none of the walking will be strenuous. Altitudes elsewhere are lower - Poas Volcano being c 2,800m.
- As we are in the tropics, the sun is very strong, even when it appears overcast. Sun protection (hat, sunglasses and suncream) is essential. We avoid walking far in the hottest part of the day.
- There are no compulsory inoculations for Costa Rica but some are recommended. We do not visit any yellow fever areas. NB If you are travelling from any country where there is yellow fever, you must have an inoculation certificate so if you are not taking the group flight, please check this. We do visit Limon Province (Tortuguero) where **there is a risk of Malaria**. The FCO linked Health website suggests that the risk is more than 'very low' and that it is therefore advisable to take malaria preventative medicine. You should consult your own doctor for specific advice. General inoculations for overseas travel are recommended. You must drink only purified drinking water at all times.
- At times, we will travel in small boats on the canals and rivers. Safety regulations will be adhered to when travelling in this way. Safety guidelines must also be followed when using canopy walks or in relation to volcanic areas or regarding other natural risks. Safety advice given by the leader and guides must be heeded at all times.

It is essential that, PRIOR TO BOOKING, you ring us to discuss any potential fitness or health problems that may affect you 01954 713575.

Insurance

Personal travel insurance providing good medical cover is essential for this trip.



Passports and Visas

You must have a valid passport for this trip (recommended valid for at least 6 months after the end of the holiday). A temporary tourist visa is issued on arrival in Costa Rica if you hold a UK passport. For holders of other passports it is essential that you check with your embassy or consulate and obtain the necessary documents prior to travel.



Flights

British Airways now offers **direct flights** to Costa Rica from London Gatwick.

It is possible to fly from Manchester with Delta Airlines, via Atlanta and JFK - check with us for options and costs. Please note that you need a machine-readable passport if you go via the USA and a USA visa. You can book the trip without flights — please contact us for the price reduction.



Flight times

1st March Departs Gatwick 11.10, arrives San Jose 16.45

15th March Departs San Jose 18.30 arrives Gatwick 10.30 (16th)

Costa Rica is 6 hours behind GMT.

TO BOOK: Contact us to check availability and reserve a place. Then complete the Booking Form and send to Sunvil Holidays (CAA-ATOL Licence 808, ABTA V6218), our tour operator, with your deposit. All details about booking are given in the Booking Pack.

DEPOSIT PER PERSON £1200, SECOND INSTALMENT ON CONFIRMATION OF HOLIDAY £800 (to cover committed costs). BALANCE DUE BY 30/11/2017

INCLUDED: Return flights from London to San Jose. All airport taxes except Costa Rica departure tax. Local transport as specified in itinerary, 14 night's accommodation (one extra night is overnight flight), full board basis (breakfast, lunch and dinner). Entrance fees except during optional sightseeing. Services of leader and guides.

NOT INCLUDED: Drinks and refreshments. Gratuities. Travel insurance.

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Photos courtesy Wildlife Travel leaders and Robin Sibson.