

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

19th November to 4th December 2024 (16 days)

COSTA RICA

easy birding and natural history

"wonderful, a holiday I will remember for many years"

Costa Rica 2017

From the dry forests and mangroves of the Pacific slope to the broad beaches and rainforest of the Caribbean slope via the cloud forests of the Talamanca mountains, this 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 previous 12 visits to this biodiverse country, where a high percentage of the land is managed for conservation. The wildlife will captivate both the new and the more seasoned traveller as we explore coastal forests and mangroves, cloud forests, rainforests and dramatic volcanic cones.

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. Moving to the Talamanca mountains, we explore high cloud forest with a chance to see the Resplendent Quetzal! We then move to the Pacific coast, visiting the dry forests in the west of the country, home to Scarlet Macaw and several species of monkey, and the American Crocodiles of the Tarcoles River. We finish our holiday at Poas Volcano where there are spectacular tropical rainforests and beautiful waterfalls.

As we travel we will 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. Walks on easy trails will give us many chances to see hummingbirds and motmots, fruit-eating bats, colourful frogs, and many tropical plants.



Price

£5,645

Single Room Supplement

£500

Full board

Day 1	travel to Costa Rica
Day 2	La Selva
Day 3-5	Tortuguero Nat'l Park
Day 6	Rancho Naturalista
Day 7	Angostura Dam
Day 8	San Gerardo de Dota
Day 9	Cerro de la Muerta
Day 10	Bosque del Tolomuco
Day 11	Rafiki Safari Lodge
Day 12	Tarcoles River
Day 13	Carara
Day 14	Poas Volcano
Day 15	San Jose
Day 16	return to UK

Leaders

Mike Symes
with local guides

Group size

min 6, max 14

tropical natural history,
exciting birding



ITINERARY

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

Day 1 Tuesday 19th November. Morning flight from UK to **San Jose**, arriving in the late afternoon. Transfer to **Bougainvillea Hotel**, San Jose.

Day 2 Wednesday 20th November. We set off north, to spend today at **La Selva Biological Station**. Operated by the Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS), this reserve has wonderful trails and walkways through stands of primary rainforest. We will find out more about the research being carried out here, at one of the most famous places for tropical research studies in the world. A great variety of birdlife could include trogons and manakins, Great Curassow and Crested Guan. The mammal life here is less concerned by people, and we will be looking out for Collared Peccary and Central American Agouti, as well as Eyelash Pit Viper and other reptiles.

After lunch at Puerto Viejo, we will explore the Pueblo Nuevo area, where we will look out for Great Green Macaws. Night at **La Quinta Sarapiquí**

Day 3, Thursday 21st November. This morning, we travel to the sultry Caribbean coast and the **Tortuguero National Park**, which can be reached only by boat or plane. Near the mouth of the Parímina River we will meet our boat that will be our transport through the Tortuguero canals, finding plenty of wildlife along the way.

In the afternoon, we will take a boat ride to visit Tortuguero town, where we will learn about the Green Turtle Conservation Project. Night at **Mawamba Lodge**

Day 4 Friday 22nd November. This morning we will take a boat trip along the canals, keeping our eyes peeled for otters and monkeys, turtles and numerous birds, including various species of herons and kingfishers. In the afternoon we will again walk one of the easy trails through the forest to the sandy beach beyond. Night at **Mawamba Lodge**

Day 5 Saturday 23rd November. Time to leave Tortuguero, we again travel by boat through the canals, exploring the riverside habitat on the way.

Back on dry land, we will head southwards, stopping for lunch along the way, before climbing into the middle elevations of the Caribbean slope to our destination close to Turrialba, a scenic lodge situated at an altitude of 900 metres.

Having settled into our rooms, we will have time to explore the grounds of the lodge, renowned in particular for their hummingbirds, with the lovely Snowcap and Black-crested Coquette two of the most notable regular visitors to the garden's flowers. Night at **Rancho Naturalista**

Day 6 Sunday 24th November. We will spend the day exploring the trails of the Rancho Naturalista Forest Reserve, a great place to become further acquainted with the species of



the Caribbean slope. As well as the feeding flocks of tanagers, euphonias and other colourful birds, the feeders around the lodge are occasionally visited by White-nosed Coati and (if we are really lucky) Tayra, an enigmatic rainforest predator with a particular liking for well-ripened bananas! Night at **Rancho Naturalista**

Day 7, Mon 25th November. A second day of acquainting ourselves with the species of the Caribbean slope, with colourful highlights likely to include Lesson's Motmot, Keel-billed Toucan and Gartered Trogon.

In the afternoon, we will visit the nearby Angostura Reservoir, where the wetland habitats will introduce us to a different suite of birds: various herons and kingfishers, the lily-trotting Northern Jacana and diminutive Least Grebe can all be expected. **Night at Rancho Naturalista**

Day 8, Tue 26th November. Today we head up 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 more hummingbirds, paying particular attention to two local specialties, the Talamanca Hummingbird and Fiery-throated Hummingbird. We will also look out for the beautiful Long-tailed Silky Flycatcher.

Further along the road we will look for one of the most beautiful birds of the Americas, the **Resplendent Quetzal**. The largest trogon, famous for its ridiculously long tail, it feeds on the wild avocados in this area, and we will be hoping to find a fruiting tree.

We finally arrive at our attractive lodge, in an area famous for its birdlife. Night at **Savegre**.



Photos: (page 2) Collared Peccary, Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth. (page 3, from top) Red-headed Barbet, Resplendent Quetzal, Lesson's Motmot, Crimson-collared Tanager, Bare-throated Tiger Heron.



Day 9 Wednesday 27th November. Depending on our success yesterday, this morning we may put more time in to looking for the quetzals again. We also expect to travel higher, to the paramo habitat of **Cerro de la Muerte** (approx. 3100m), home to a very different flora, as well as the endemic Volcano Junco, Volcano Hummingbird and Timberline Wren.

After a leisurely lunch in a local café, with yet more birds coming to the busy feeders along with Variegated Squirrels, we will explore part of the famous **Los Quetzales NP** along the Savegre River, an area rich in birdlife. Night at **Savegre**.

Day 10 Thursday 28th November. We head down from the mountains, into the foothills of the Pacific slope. On the way, we will stop at Bosque del Tolomuco, a great place for hummingbirds and tanagers, where more typically 'highland' species such as Spangle-cheeked Tanager mix with foothill species such as Snowy-bellied Hummingbird and Speckled Tanager.

We finish our day down in the lowland forests of the lower Savegre valley where our lodge is located. Night at **Rafiki Safari Lodge**

Day 11 Friday 29th November. We will have a full day of exploring the trails around the lodge. Species we hope to find in the area include Golden-hooded Tanager, Fiery-billed Aracari, and the appropriately-named Charming Hummingbird.

During our time here, we expect to take at least one night walk, depending on weather conditions. The forest comes alive at night: various tree frogs and reptiles are easier to find after dark, while nightbirds include potoos, owls and nightjars. Nocturnal mammals could include various species of opossum, Nine-banded Armadillo, Kinkajou and Mexican Porcupine. Night at **Rafiki Safari Lodge**.

Day 12 Saturday 30th November. Today we have some miles to cover, as we head west, towards the central Pacific coast.

Our destination is the Tarcoles River, where we will take a boat trip, exploring the muddy banks and mangrove swamps: more than ten species of heron can be seen here, including the shy Boat-billed Heron, small groups of Scarlet Macaws fly overhead as they commute between feeding sites, and mangrove specialties include Mangrove Swallow and Mangrove Vireo.

We continue on to our hotel, from where we will hope for a good 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 **Selva Mar Hotel**, Carara.

Day 13 Sunday 1st December. This morning we will visit the Carara Biological Reserve, located between two major habitats, the dry forest of the north-west and the rainforest of the south Pacific slope. The area is described as a 'must' for anyone interested in tropical biology, with high species diversity and relatively easy access.

The forest in this area is a wonderful contrast to the rainforests and cloud forests we have



seen elsewhere, and has a very different set of species, including the spectacular Scarlet Macaw.

Nearby, we will stop at the famous 'crocodile bridge', where the large American Crocodiles lounge on the river bank, before we head back towards the busy roads of the Central Valley, and return to the capital of San Jose. Night **Hotel Bougainvillea**.

Day 14 Monday 2nd December. From San Jose, we will 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, and we hope to find Volcano Hummingbird and Poas Squirrel amongst others along the way, while getting a good (sulphury) sense of nature's power from the rim of the caldera.

Heading for lower altitudes, we will travel to San Fernando Waterfall, located in the cloud forest of the Caribbean slope, where we will see many hummingbirds and tanagers, Blue-throated Toucanet and Prong-billed Barbet coming to the feeders.

Day 15 Tuesday 3rd December. We will have one last morning excursion, as we explore an area of undeveloped remnant scrub and grassland not far from the airport, where some of the birds of the Central Valley's dry woodlands can be found, including the handsome endemic Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow, Blue Grosbeak, Crested Bobwhite and yet more hummingbirds in the form of Green-breasted Mango and Plain-capped Starthroat.

And then, all too soon, it will be time to head back to the hotel to re-pack, ready for our afternoon flights home, arriving **Day 16 Wednesday 4th December**.

Photos: (page 4) Scarlet Macaw (Robin Sibson), Blue-jeans Poison Dart Frog. (page 5, from top) Fiery-throated Hummingbird, Collared Aracari, *Passiflora vitifolia*, Lesser Violetear, *Heliconia wagneriana*.



Accommodation, meals and transport

All of the lodges and hotels are of a good standard, some with very attractive settings. 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 local conditions change or if we feel a different choice would suit our needs better.

All meals are included - some lunches will be in local restaurants, and we will take a picnic on some days.

We will do our best to 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).

Leader and guides

Our leader for this trip is Mike Symes. Mike is an excellent all-round naturalist and professional ecologist who has worked for Devon Wildlife Trust for more than 10 years. Mike has led many previous holidays for Wildlife Travel, from his home county of Devon to Tanzania and the Danube Delta. He has previously spent time in Costa Rica, including leading our 2020 holiday. His enthusiasm for all aspects of natural history, together with his keenness to share this knowledge with others will help to ensure that you enjoy a wonderful holiday.

We will be accompanied throughout by an expert Costa Rican guide, along with local guides at some sites, including La Selva and Tortuguero.

Between them, our leader and guides will ensure that you have a relaxing and enjoyable holiday, and enjoy the spectacular wildlife of this beautiful part of the world.

Weather and seasons

We will be travelling at the start of the dry season making travelling easier and with less likelihood of rain in some areas, although the weather may still be unpredictable and wet at times.

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. November 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 rainforest and we can expect generally cooler weather with, perhaps, some showers.

Costa Rica is six hours behind GMT.



Health and Fitness

You will 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.

As we are in the tropics, the sun is very strong, even when it appears overcast. Sun protection (hat, sunglasses and suncream) is essential. Where possible, we will avoid walking in the hottest part of the day.

The highest altitudes visited during our itinerary will be c 3,100m asl at Cerro de la Muerte (the lodge is at a lower elevation) and 2,800m asl on Poas Volcano. 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

Safety advice given by the leaders must be heeded at all times. We will receive a **safety briefing** once on board the boat, and safety rules (e.g. wearing life jackets whilst in small boats) are strictly adhered to. Safety guidelines must also be followed when using canopy walkways, or in relation to volcanic areas.



Photos: (page 6) Green Basilisk, Sungrebe.
(page 7, from top) White-nosed Coati, Snowcap,
Centropogon granulatus, Zebra Heliconia butterfly,
Heliconia psittacorum.



Flights

Group flights are with British Airways from London Gatwick, as follows:

19th November Depart **London Gatwick 11.05**, arrive San Jose 16.50
3rd December Depart San Jose 18.40, arrive **London Gatwick 10.55 (4th)**

It may also be possible to fly from Manchester, with Delta Airlines via the US: ask us about options and costs.

Entry Requirements: Passports, Visas and covid

Please note that travel rules may be changed by either the UK or Costa Rican government at any time. For up to date information, please check www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/costa-rica. Holders of non-UK passports should check with the relevant embassy.

British nationals do not need a visa to enter Costa Rica. You may stay as a visitor for up to 90 days under a tourist visa waiver. If you are visiting Costa Rica, your passport should have at least one day's validity from the date you are leaving Costa Rica.

There are no covid-related vaccination requirements to enter Costa Rica.

Travel Health

There is a very low risk of malaria in the parts of Costa Rica we visit, and prophylaxis isn't usually recommended. Vaccines against Hepatitis A and Tetanus are recommended for most travellers, and you might also want to consider Typhoid and Rabies vaccines.

Travellers should arrange an appointment with their health professional at least four to six weeks before travel to assess health risks. Up-to-date information on travel health can be found at travelhealthpro.org.uk

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 £2,500, SECOND INSTALMENT ON
CONFIRMATION OF HOLIDAY £1,500 (to cover committed costs)
BALANCE DUE BY 20/08/2024**

INCLUDED: Return flights from London to San Jose, including airport taxes. Local transport as specified in itinerary. 14 nights' accommodation (1 night extra on overnight flight), full board basis (all meals from dinner day 1 to lunch day 15). Entry fees. Services of leader and local guides.

NOT INCLUDED: Drinks with evening meals, refreshments. Gratuities. Travel insurance. Covid tests and associated costs.

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

**The Manor House, Broad Street,
Great Cambourne, Cambridge CB23 6DH**

Tel: 01954 713575 email: wildlifetravel@wildlifebcn.org
www.wildlife-travel.co.uk



*Directors: Christine Donnelly, Brian Eversham, Laurie Jackson, Philip Precey, Michael Russell, Tim Upson
Wildlife Travel Ltd. Reg. No 2237697; (for Registered Charity numbers, please contact us)*

Photos: All photos taken on previous Wildlife Travel visits to Costa Rica, courtesy Mike Symes and Philip Precey. Front cover (clockwise from top): Red-eyed Tree Frog, Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher, Panamanian White-faced Capuchin, Talamanca Hummingbird, *Heliconia psittacorum*

Trip reports from several of our previous Costa Rican holidays can be found on our website.