

## Itinerary for Costa Rica

### February 8-22, 2025: \$4,800 Double Occupancy

Only about the same size as West Virginia, Costa Rica boasts over 900 birds and 250 mammal species. It is also home to over 11% of all butterfly species. The country is more than just an eco-destination as tourists flock here for gorgeous beaches and various adventure sports, including bungee jumping, zip-lining, parasailing, and more. Lake Arenal (in the north-central portion of Costa Rica) is home to world competitions in sail gliding.

Fully 1/3 of Costa Rica is protected in a combination of national parks and private reserves. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, almost 11% of the entire economy depended on tourism, and early economic indicators show the percentage of tourism dependence may only increase.

Costa Rica's countryside includes hundreds of waterfalls, dozens of volcanoes, and beaches on both coasts. Electronic components (18%), medical equipment (7.3), and pineapples (6%) are the top three exports. In addition, every baseball used in a Major League Baseball game comes from Costa Rica.

**Costa Rica** (literally "Rich Coast"), officially the Republic of Costa Rica (Spanish: *República de Costa Rica*), is a country in the Central American region of North America, bordered by Nicaragua to the north, the Caribbean Sea to the northeast, Panama to the southeast, the Pacific Ocean to the southwest, and maritime border with Ecuador to the south of Cocos Island. About five million people live in Costa Rica, with nearly half the population living in San Jose (the nation's capital city) and its metropolitan area.

Costa Rica's workforce is highly educated; 6.9% of its budget goes to education (*Seattle Times*, March 2019). It has a long-standing and stable democracy and a highly educated workforce. Once heavily dependent on agriculture, its economy has diversified to include sectors such as finance, corporate services for foreign companies, pharmaceuticals, and ecotourism. Many foreign manufacturing and services companies operate in Costa Rica's Free Trade Zones (FTZ), benefiting from investment and tax incentives (Wikipedia). For baseball fans, all baseballs manufactured for use in major league baseball come from Costa Rica. (This was once the million-dollar question on *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*)

There were two main tribes in Costa Rica before Spanish settlement, the Kekoldi and Bri Bri tribes. Costa Rica remained under Spanish possession until declaring independence in 1847. After the Costa Rican Civil War, the country abolished its military, becoming one of few countries without a standing army.

The country has consistently performed favorably in the Human Development Index (HDI), placing 62nd in the world as of 2020 and fifth in Latin America. Costa Rica also performs well in comparing the state of democracy, press freedom, and subjective happiness. It has the 7th most unrestrained press according to the Press Freedom Index, the 37th most democratic

country according to the Freedom in the World Index and the 12th happiest country in the World Happiness Report (Wikipedia).

### Provinces

Costa Rica has seven geographical provinces: Puntarenas, Alajuela, Guanacaste, San José, Limón, Heredia, and Cartago. Geographically, the largest is Puntarenas, which includes the southwestern portion of Costa Rica and extends up the Gulf of Nicoya to the Guanacaste province.

## Trip Details

I strongly recommend you arrive a day early at Hotel Bougainvillea, which is NOT included in the tour price. This allows you to relax during travel because you can still make the trip on time if you miss a flight. Our lodge, Hotel Bougainvillea, offers an outstanding introduction to birding Costa Rica, boasting over 325 species.

**February 9:** After breakfast, we'll begin the climb to San Gerardo De Dota. Along the way, you'll stop for lunch and take advantage of some beautiful birding stops, where you're likely to pick up Long-tailed Silky Flycatcher, Fiery-throated, Talamanca, and Volcano hummingbirds, Collared Redstart, and perhaps your first glimpse of a Resplendent Quetzal. We'll settle into our lodge, Gema Del Bosque, then head out for your initial birding trip at this productive valley.



*Yellow-throated Toucan*

**February 10:** You'll be out birding before breakfast, as our only chance at many higher-elevation birds occurs here. Flame-throated Warbler, Emerald Toucanet, Black-and-Yellow Silky Flycatcher, and Yellow-thighed Brushfinch are some of your targets. After breakfast, we'll head to the best area for excellent looks at Resplendent Quetzals.

We'll break for lunch, then head up over 10,000 feet in a search for Timberline Wren, the endemic Volcano Junco, Volcano Hummingbird, Spangle-cheeked Tanager, Black-capped Flycatcher, Barred Becard, and many more.

### **February 11**

You'll bird the area around our lodge before breakfast. Then you'll board your van for the short ride to San Isidro de el General, an area known for Red-capped, Blue-crowned, and Orange-collared Manakins, Golden-crowned Spadebill, Scaly-breasted Wren and the stunning Turquoise Cotinga. You'll break for lunch, then head wherever Luis is hearing has had recent great bird sightings.



*Resplendent Quetzal*

Anthrush, and White-crested Couette, along with many others.

### **February 13**

This morning, you'll depart San Isidro and head for the southernmost parts of Costa Rica at San Vito. You will enter a part of Costa Rica that tourists do not visit. This gives you an authentic flavor of Costa Rican life and shows you what a village in a less-visited area is like.

You will stop at several great birding spots. San Juan wetlands yield some challenging birds like Chiriqui Yellowthroat, Masked Duck and White-throated and Gray-breasted crakes, and other water-loving birds like Gray-cowled Wood-rail, Common and Purple Gallinule, Northern Jacana, and Southern Lapwing. You'll settle into your room in San Vito before walking to town for dinner.

### **February 14**

You'll want to be up early, as your focus will be on the very productive Wilson Botanical Gardens, a part of Organization for Tropical Studies. Commonly sighted birds include Scaled Pigeon, Snowy-bellied, Charming, and Scaly-breasted hummingbirds, Gartered and Collared trogons, Barred Forest-Falcon, Laughing Falcon, and a variety of parrots like Blue-headed, White-crowned, and Brown-hooded. Turquoise Cotinga is also sporadically common.

In the afternoon, we have several great birding spots. San Juan wetlands are very productive. Key targets include Chiriqui Yellowthroat, Masked Duck, White-throated and Gray-breasted crakes, and other water-loving birds like Gray-cowled Wood-rail, Common and Purple Gallinule, Northern Jacana, and Southern Lapwing.

### **February 12**

This morning, you'll explore a local nature reserve, where your targets include Chestnut-capped and White-naped Brushfinch, Red-headed Barbet, Flame Colored and Bay-headed tanagers, and Slate-throated Redstart.

After lunch, we'll continue birding the area, searching for Great Tinamou, Fiery-billed Aracari, Riverside Wren, Olivaceous Piculet, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Rudy Woodcreeper, Black-faced

## February 15

This morning, you head west to Esquinas Rainforest Lodge on the edge of Piedras Blancas National Park. We'll likely arrive after lunch. The lodge grounds are a birding haven, and nearby forests provide excellent wildlife habitat. Monkeys are common in the area, with four species visible, the mantled howler, white-faced capuchin, spider, and squirrel monkey. Heliconia flowers on the grounds often attract interesting hummingbirds like Sapphire-throated and Veraguan Mango.

Otherwise difficult-to-see birds we should spot working the lodge grounds include Blue Ground-dove, Gray-chested Dove, Great and Little Tinamou, Striped Cuckoo, Ocellated Owl, Black-hooded Antshrike, Dot-winged Antbird, and Orange-collared and Red-capped Manakin.

## February 16

Your lodge, Esquinas Rainforest Lodge, is the only decent access to Piedras Blancas National Park. While the trails are challenging, we'll search for the endemic Black-cheeked Ant-Tanager and elusive Black-striped Woodcreeper and Yellow-billed Cacique. Many birder's pulses quicken when they learn that King Vultures are also familiar sights in the park. You should often see Swallow-tailed Kites flying the skies overhead, and they may be joined by Gray-headed Kite and Black Hawk-eagle.

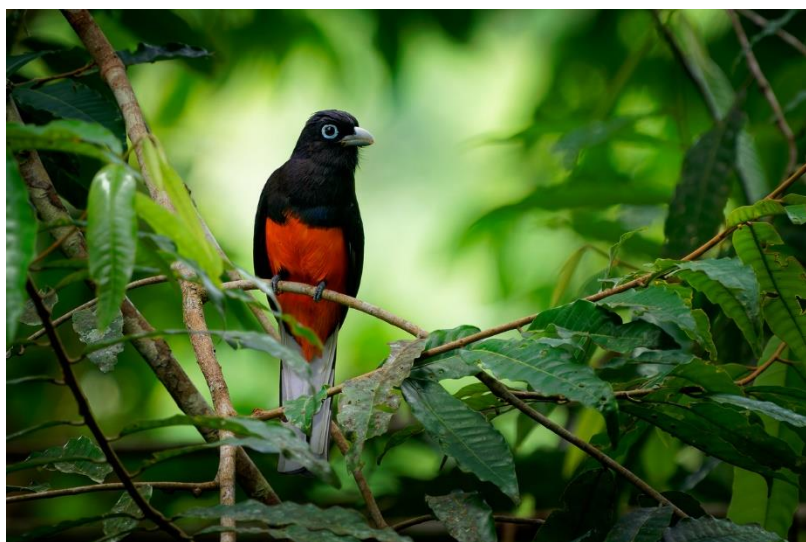
## February 17

You have a long, four-hour drive to reach Tarcoles today. You'll stop and bird some hotspots along the way, and lunch will be at a typical Costa Rican café. As you cross the Tarcoles River, you'll notice many people looking over the edge to see the massive American Crocodiles below. You'll arrive at Tarcoles Birding Lodge in time for dinner. After a long drive in the car, bedtime will be welcomed.

By this point of the trip, your bird list will likely be over 300 species.

## February 18

This morning, you're off right after breakfast to explore the trails at Carara National Park. This humid, warm tropical forest is best visited during the early morning hours, when birdlife is prolific, and the taxing humidity and heat haven't taken a toll.



1 Baird's Trogon

Birds you hope to see in Carara include Pale-billed Woodpecker, Baird's and Slaty-tailed trogons, Plain Xenops, Chiriqui Foliage-Gleaner, Black-hooded and Russet Antshrike, and Wedge-billed, Cocoa, and Streak-headed Woodcreeper.

After a refreshing lunch, you'll hop on a boat for a magical tour of the Tarcoles River and mangroves. You should see the Mangrove Hummingbird, Mangrove Vireo, and many more familiar birds like Roseate Spoonbill and various herons and egrets. Bare-throated Tiger-Heron is almost always seen working the banks here. An incredible end to the day is the Scarlet Macaws loudly announcing their presence as they head back to their roosts for the night.

### **February 19**

This morning, you'll bird around Tarcoles Birding Lodge, searching for whatever misses you may have had yesterday. After breakfast, you'll head north and west. In a rare treat in Costa Rica, your group will board the ferry across the Nicoya Gulf on the way to our lodge for the evening. When you return to land after the short ride, you'll be in a temperate dry forest, one of the most threatened forests in the world.

Your bird targets include the White-throated Magpie Jay, Blue-throated Goldentail, Blue-vented and Cinnamon Hummingbirds, Lesson's, and Turquoise-browed Motmot, Long-tailed Manakin, and the bizarrely adorned Three-wattled Bellbird, which is at lower elevations in February. You'll arrive at your hotel in plenty of time for dinner, wander the beaches, and see the sunset over the Pacific Ocean.

### **February 20**

This is a very early start, as we will be on the ocean for six hours to start the day. February is peak time for spotting aquatic birds, and some targets include Pink-footed, Wedge-tailed



*White Tern*

Shearwaters, Least, and Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrels, Red-footed, Blue-footed and Brown boobies, Black, Least and Arctic terns. As with any pelagic birding trip, it will all be about our luck, in combination with weather and ocean currents.

### **February 21**

Luis never stops working hard, and our final full day will be no different. On your drive back to the San Jose area, Luis will stop at

multiple birding spots that might provide birds that you might have missed.

We'll arrive in time to bird the grounds of our lodge. Tonight will be a celebratory, final group dinner. Our list will likely top 400 species at this point. You will have a new Tico friend in Luis and many more from other birders in our group.

**February 22**

You will be transported to the airport for your flight home.