

Costa Rica Wildlife & Birding

a Custom Journey
with Tucson Audubon Society



February 27-March 9, 2024
A Custom Journey for
the Tucson Audubon Society
To register, contact Naturalist Journeys:
866.900.1146 / 520.558.1146
travel@naturalistjourneys.com
www.naturalistjourneys.com



Few places rival Costa Rica's ecological diversity. Over a quarter of the country is protected lands, boasting 850 bird species and 200+ mammals. Costa Rica has remained at the top of the list for traveler satisfaction, with talented guides, superb nature lodges, and fabulous birds and mammals.

On this custom journey for the Tucson Audubon Society, hosted by Jennie MacFarland, search pristine forests at La Selva Biological Station for Neotropical specialties. Traverse the Continental Divide, from lowland rainforest to cloud forest. Glide down a river looking for secretive birds such as Sunbittern and Green Ibis, several species of kingfisher, Green Iguana, and Mantled Howler Monkey. Relax at a mountain lodge and witness Northern Emerald-Toucanet and Collared Redstart in the wild Savegre Valley, a special place where Resplendent Quetzal nests and American Dipper feed in the rushing stream.

Tour Highlights

- Search for the stunning Resplendent Quetzal, high in the cloud forest at a private reserve
- Spot Flame-throated Warbler, Flame-colored Tanager, Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, and Emerald Toucanet in the splendid Rio Savegre Valley
- Enjoy close-up hummingbird viewing from the verandah at Rancho Naturalista
- Explore and bird the fascinating archaeological site of Guayabo National Monument
- Seek out lowland rainforest specialties at a famous site for tropical research, La Selva Biological Station
- Relax on a Sarapiquí River boat trip as you search for Sunbittern, Green Ibis, and Fasciated Tiger-Heron
- Visit the scenic Pacific Coast and Carara National Park to see a mix of species west of the Continental Divide

Tour Summary

12-Day / 11-Night Costa Rican Birding & Nature Tour

\$4990 DBL / \$5580 SGL, from San José

Airport is Juan Santa María International, San Jose Costa Rica (SJO)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Tues., Feb. 27 Welcome to Costa Rica!

Welcome to Costa Rica! Today you arrive in San José where you are met at the airport by a representative from Horizontes, our Costa Rican host company, for a private transfer to the Hotel Bougainvillea. We select this boutique hotel for its spacious rooms, friendly service, and spectacular birdy gardens, just outside the door. This is an environmentally friendly hotel with a commitment to our planet *and* hospitality. Those arriving in time can walk the beautiful grounds and start in with some great birding. We gather to enjoy a welcome dinner with fellow traveling companions and guide. Those that arrive later than dinner have a snack tray on arrival.

Accommodations at Hotel Bougainvillea (D)

Wed., Feb. 28 Turrialba | Rancho Naturalista

After breakfast, we drive back through the mountains toward Turrialba, where our lodge, Rancho Naturalista, has nestled in another scenic range.

We enjoy lunch at a restaurant along our travel route and, in the afternoon upon arrival at the lodge, we enjoy birding from the balcony. This is a delight — particularly for those that fancy close-up views of hummingbirds. A number of mid-elevation Caribbean-side specialties can be found here including the beautiful Snowcap. Temperatures are cool at a comfortable 3000 feet. At day's end, we are likely to see Keel-billed and Yellow-throated Toucans, and Collared Aracari coming into their roost.

Accommodations at Rancho Naturalista (B,L,D)

Thurs., Feb. 29 Leap Year Birding – Full Day at Rancho Naturalista

Wake up and bird on the balcony where, with luck, a mixed group of colorful tanagers works the bananas on the feeders. We can hope for Passerini's, Speckled, Bay-headed, Silver-throated, and Summer. White-necked Jacobin are regulars, and a special treat is the tiny, Black-crested Coquette. Blue-crowned Motmot and Golden-olive Woodpecker are "yard birds." Indeed, over 200 species have been seen from this balcony! Linger as we may, trails and exploring call.

Though small (125 acres), the reserve has a nice mix of habitats. Open crowns of Cecropia trees afford us good looks at colorful species like Green Honeycreeper, Squirrel Cuckoo, and Blue Dacnis. White-ruffed Manakin and Fasciated Antshrike call, alerting us to their presence along the trails. One of the trails leads us to hummingbird feeders set up in the forest. Here we often find the stunning Snowcap, alongside colorful Crowned Woodnymph, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, and large Green Hermit.

Accommodations at Rancho Naturalista (B,L,D)

Fri., March 1 Guayabo | Sarapiquí | Heliconias Island Birding & Blooms

Today we continue on to the Caribbean lowlands. En route, we visit Guayabo National Monument, a fascinating archaeological site where rocks are carved into figures in many stylized forms. Established in 1973, it is the largest and one of the most impressive archaeological sites in Costa Rica. While it does not rival the great Maya civilization sites, this complex settlement lies in a beautiful valley, perched on the side of a mountain. We find cobblestone paths, building foundations, and water canals that date from 1100 BC to 1400 AD. Forests surrounding the site vary from second growth to dense mature forest. Vegetation is lush and beautiful, and mixed flocks of colorful tanagers, grosbeaks, and orioles like the edge-effect of the excavated ruins.

We enjoy lunch along the way at a local restaurant and, once settled in at our hotel, we visit local birding hotspots around this lovely community. Many private gardens such as Heliconias Island attract a rich array of hummingbirds, and having changed elevation, many species, particularly of colorful tanagers, are new.

Accommodations at Sarapiquí Rainforest Lodge (B,L,D)

Sat., March 2 La Selva Biological Station | Sarapiquí River Boat Tour

Wake up to sounds of the lowland forest. Nearby, the La Selva Biological Station is one of the premier tropical research stations in the world and we visit it today. Trails wind between laboratories and researchers' residences, and then fan out to primary and secondary forests where nature abounds. Lowland rainforest is particularly diverse here, as the property is located near the confluence of two major rivers—the Rio Puerto Viejo and the Sarapiquí. The reserve is nearly 4,000 acres and connects to a forest corridor that ascends up through nearby Braulio Carrillo National Park, providing links to middle and higher elevations.

La Selva comprises 1,600 hectares (3,900 acres) of tropical wet forests and disturbed lands. Four major tropical life zones define the contiguous corridor now protecting a large portion of Costa Rica's biodiversity. Recorded here are more than half of Costa Rica's almost 900 species of birds, 1850 species of vascular plants, and a rich array of mammals, insects, reptiles, and amphibians. Each year, La Selva's Christmas Bird Count is among the highest in numbers.

On trails near the Sarapiquí River we hope to see the beautiful Agami Heron and perhaps an elusive Sungrebe. Some of the other elusive species we may find include Great Curassow, Great or Slaty-breasted Tinamou, Great Potoo, and possibly Bare-necked Umbrellabird. We should see Crimson-collared and Golden-hooded Tanagers, Rufous Motmot, endemic Black-cheeked Woodpecker, beautiful Snowy Cotinga, and, high on thermals above, King Vulture. Pied Puffbird and Great Jacamar are sit-and-wait predators that dart from perches to capture large insects. Orange-billed Sparrow are gaudy denizens of the forest floor.

Butterfly enthusiasts, prepare to be amazed at all the species, including several large electric-blue Morphos. Central American Agouti and White-nosed Coati are mammals we often find.

In the late afternoon, we venture out on the Sarapiquí River for a boat trip; late afternoon is a great time to find secretive birds like Sunbittern, Green Ibis, Fasciated Tiger-Heron, several kingfishers, herons, and egrets. Yellow-naped and White-crowned Parrots make raucous noise overhead, joined by the smaller Olive-throated Parakeet. It's beautiful to be out on the water where the temperature is cool and views of the mountains are spectacular.

Accommodations at Sarapiquí Rainforest Lodge (B,L,D)

Sun., March 3 Cinchona Waterfalls & Hummingbirds | La Ensenada Lodge

Today we depart the lush Caribbean lowlands of Sarapiquí to climb up to the central plateau, passing through some incredible scenery, and witness a waterfall to be remembered. Enjoy the vista from Café de Colibris where from the veranda we can find up to ten species of hummingbird, including the lovely Green Thorntail—wow! We hope to also find Northern Emerald-Toucanet, and both Prong-billed and Red-headed Barbet. Buff-fronted Quail-Dove can often be seen wandering in the area below the feeders. The waterfall is situated across a massive drainage, an important biological corridor linking high mountain terrain with the Caribbean lowlands.

As we continue on to the Pacific side of the country, watch for Bat Falcon, Squirrel Cuckoo, and Brown Jay, plus we have one more day to listen to the songs of Clay-colored Thrush and Rufous-collared Sparrow. We continue on to reach La Ensenada, a country lodge on a lake. This family-run lodge, where we stay the next two nights, features 20 simple, but comfortable, cabins, a swimming pool, and a delightful open-air restaurant that prepares local foods. The lodge is part of a working cattle ranch and fruit farm, and also part of a 100-acre wildlife reserve. All cabins have ceiling fans, wood paneling, high ceilings, and private terraces. This special property holds some of the last remaining primary dry forest, as well as a mangrove ecosystem, and is on the beautiful Gulf of Nicoya.

As we settle in, watch the sky for Magnificent Frigatebird and Brown Pelican; we may also be able to enjoy the antics of colonies of Montezuma Oropendola, Piratic Flycatcher, Squirrel Cuckoo, and colorful Cherrie's Tanager and Spot-breasted Oriole in the trees.

Accommodations at La Ensenada Lodge (B,L,D)

Mon., March 4 Birding by Boat & Tractor

After breakfast at the hotel, we venture out to enjoy a great birding site near the Gulf of Nicoya at a private reserve. The deltas of the Bebederas River, or Rio Abangeres, both have a tremendous array of wetland habitats: mangroves, swamps, swamp forests, both fresh and saltwater marshes, and lagoons. Herons and egrets congregate here, joined by the ancient-looking Wood Stork. A verdant oasis in the driest region of Costa Rica, the Gulf of Nicoya is a birdwatcher's paradise. Because the Tempisque is a tidal river, salt-water loving Crocodiles venture upstream. More than 300 species of birds have been recorded here, and an estimated 250,000 wading birds and waterfowl winter here, giving us tremendous opportunities for spectacular sightings.

Large-scale seasonal flooding occurs here; as the dry season progresses, the wetland habitat shrinks, concentrating the bird population. Black-bellied and Fulvous Whistling Ducks can be quite common in some years, and many North American ducks winter in the estuary. Touring by boat is the perfect way to explore its riches.

At cooler times of the day, we walk trails in tropical dry forest. The limestone cliffs in this area pose quite a contrast to the volcanic region we previously visited. There are also pre-Hispanic archaeological sites in the region.

In the afternoon we tour the ranch by tractor, ending our day with wine and cheese at sunset—such a life! In dry forests we watch for White-throated Magpie-Jay, Streak-backed Oriole, Banded Wren, and Black-headed Trogon. We then return to the lodge for dinner and a relaxing evening to tally our wildlife sightings.

Accommodations at Ensenada Lodge (B,L,D)

Tues., March 5 Cerro Lodge | Guacalillo Mangroves Birding by Boat

We leave the lovely La Ensenada Lodge to continue south along Costa Rica's scenic Pacific Coast where we settle into our lodgings in a lovely valley with a rushing river, close to the Pacific Ocean. The hotel and dining room sit aside a small river, and there is a steady stream of species coming in, including toucans and aracarís. We should arrive in time for lunch.

This afternoon, towards day's end when bird activity is higher, we take a boat trip on the Tarcoles River through the Guacalillo mangroves. This is a great complement to our boat trip on the Sarapiquí, showing you two sides of the country. If time permits, especially if we have not seen macaws on our boat trip, we stop on a high bridge with expansive views. Though busy with traffic, this is the best place in Costa Rica to watch for Scarlet Macaw returning to roost sites. Their calls alert us and, as we wait to see their dazzling colors, we find a host of other species such as Mealy Parrot and, close-at-hand, noisy Rufous-naped Wren.

Accommodations at Cerro Lodge (B,L,D)

Wed., March 6 Carara National Park | Cloudforests | Savegre Valley

This morning we have an early start to enjoy a full morning of birding at Carara National Park, a place many consider to be one of the top ten birding spots in Central America. Here we witness birds and

wildlife of a transition forest, walking trails and searching for birds, butterflies, and mammals. This park can claim almost unparalleled diversity along the Central American Pacific Coast, as many species here are at the edge of their range. This is the northern reach of species at home in Pacific Rainforest, and the southern reach for those associated with Pacific Dry Forests.

Carara's forests' more open nature makes it easier for us to find birds. Carara is an excellent place to observe an army-ant swarm and its attendant feeding antbirds. We may find Scaly-breasted Hummingbird or Blue-throated Goldentail. Orange-collared Manakin, Black-hooded Antshrike, Dot-winged Antwren, Dusky Antbird, and Chestnut-backed Antbird are among the more secretive species we hope to find. Vegetation is impressive in this important ecological reserve.

We have lunch in route to Suria Mountain Hotel in San Gerardo de Dota. This is our gateway to the exciting Savegre Valley, where we bird in cloudforest, montane forest and along a rushing stream. Settle into the cozy accommodations, enjoy the lush gardens for birding and some wonderful cuisine. *Accommodations at Suria Mountain Hotel (B,L,D)*

Thursday, March 07th Savegre Valley – Quetzals and Mountain Forests

Today we walk the local road where we get an excellent view of these beautiful Talamanca Range forests and their fantastic residents, like Flame-throated Warbler, Flame-colored Tanager, Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, Black Guan, and Northern Emerald-Toucanet. Throughout the valley, various trails lead to waterfalls, secluded canyons, and mountain vistas; several options are available to us. A rushing stream flows through the valley, we may even find American Dipper here alongside Central American species.

Resplendent Quetzals are found in this valley year-round, and we often spot them near a favorite fruiting tree where several males may congregate. On trails that wind past rivers and lakes, we look for Collared Trogon, Collared and Slate-throated Redstart, Large-footed Finch, and Sooty Robin.

Montane oak forest dominates the area, including magnificent oaks like Wild Brazillito, Winter's Bark Tree, and Cipresillo. We take a stab at identifying them and then simply admire the hundreds of species of bromeliads, lichens, mosses, ferns, and the multitude of orchids and colorful flowers. Locals raise fruit on the hillsides and farm trout in small ponds.

We also want to visit the Cerro Buena Vista, highest point on the Pan American Highway for a chance to see some higher elevation specialties and will time that with weather during the course of our stay. *Accommodations at Suria Mountain Hotel (B,L,D)*

Fri., March 8 Paraiso de Quetzales | Return to San Jose

This morning we say good-bye to the Savegre area and trace our steps back towards the Central Valley and San Jose. We make it a full day of birding, with a visit the trails of Paraiso de Quetzales, a very successful project involving local farmers that share their lands with birders. March is nesting season for Resplendent Quetzal and even if we have seen them at Savegre, this is another chance to marvel at their beauty, watch their behavior and perhaps see a nesting pair. There are many other birds seen on trails of lush forests surrounding the farms, and lunch hosted by the family is a treat.

After lunch we drive back to San Jose where we check into our lodgings and you have a chance to pack and get organized for the journey home ahead of our farewell dinner.

Accommodations at the Doubletree Cariari by Hilton Hotel (B,L,D)

Sat., March 9 Departures

Breakfast and transfers to the airport according to departure flights

Tour Details

Registration

Please contact Naturalist Journeys, let them know you wish to travel on the custom Costa Rica journey set up for Tucson Audubon and they will help you with forms, payment and tour information.

travel@naturalistjourneys.com / 866-900-1146. Naturalist Journeys is located in Portal, AZ.

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance, an option to book online is on the Naturalist Journeys website. Pre-tour materials will be sent by Naturalist Journeys to assist your preparation for the trip.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey (main tour) is **\$4990 DBL / \$5580 SGL**, from San José, Costa Rica. Tour cost includes all accommodations, meals as specified in the itinerary, professional guide services, other park and program entrance fees and miscellaneous program expenses.

Tour cost does not include: Round-trip transportation from your home city to San José, optional activities, or items of a personal nature like laundry, telephone charges, gratuities for guides and lodge staff, or beverages from the bar.

Travel Information

Arrive in San José on or before February 27, ideally between 2:00 and 5:00 PM to make the most of your stay at our lovely hotel. Those arriving at the airport by 5:00 PM can join us for a welcome dinner at the hotel. If your flight arrives after 6:00 PM, plan to eat dinner on the plane, or we can hold a snack tray for you on late arrival to the hotel. If your flight arrives late, consider coming in a day early to rest up and not miss that first evening, we can book this for you and add the room cost with transfer to your tour invoice. You may depart at any time on March 9, but remember you need to be at the airport 3 hours ahead of your flight, so flights after 10AM are recommended.

Pace of the Tour

This is a moderate-paced tour with some full field days and walks of 1-2 miles over uneven terrain. The walks are at a birder's pace but do require standing and waiting at times to fully observe species. Multiple nights at hotels allows you to choose how much you do on those field days. We travel in a comfortable air-conditioned bus and stay at lovely nature-oriented hotels with dining services and

private bath in room. Some of the lodges have stairs and rooms may be situated away from the main dining area. Special diets can usually be accommodated, please ask.

Photo Credits: Keel-billed Toucan, Doug Greenberg; Crimson-collared Tanager, Carlos Sanchez; Resplendent Quetzal, Carlos Sanchez; Red-eyed Tree Frog, Greg Smith; Sloth, Peg Abbott; Violet Sabrewing, Sandy Sorkin.

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