



**COSTA RICA SPECIALTIES TOUR WITH OPTIONAL EXTENSION
TO THE MONTEVERDE/SAN GERARDO AREA**

28 March - 14 (18) APRIL 2021



© Andy Walker/Birding Ecotours 2017

Gartered Trogon is one of several species of trogon possible on this trip.

As one of the most prosperous countries in Central America, Costa Rica, with its good infrastructure, stable democratic government, high literacy rate, and extensive network of parks and preserves has long been an important ecotourism destination for travelers from all over the world. This verdant paradise has also long been a classic, premier destination for birdwatchers, and with good reason. The literal translation of Costa Rica means ‘rich coast’, and it is truly rich in birds, with over 900 species recorded in a country only the size of West Virginia. Ideally positioned at the meeting point where the avifauna of Central and South America intermingle, this small country hosts the highest avian diversity in an area of its size anywhere on Earth. However, Costa Rica hosts more than just an astonishingly rich diversity of birds. Along with neighboring Panama, this small country is one of the great centers of avian endemism in the world, with over 70 regional endemics that occur nowhere else!

This carefully-designed itinerary targets these regional endemics as well as numerous must-see, charismatic species, such as **Resplendent Quetzal, Jabiru, Agami Heron, Sungrebe, King Vulture, Great Curassow, Scarlet Macaw, Great Green Macaw, Green-and-rufous Kingfisher, Zeledon’s, Bare-crowned, and Spotted Antbirds, Sharpbill, Lovely, Snowy, Turquoise, and Yellow-billed Cotingas, Silvery-fronted Tapaculo, Wrenthrush, Snowcap, Coppery-headed Emerald, Mangrove Hummingbird, and Black-cheeked Ant Tanager** among many more exciting antbirds, tanagers, woodpecker, trogons, and hummingbirds.

Our optional extension to the Monteverde/San Gerardo area will focus on specialties of that area, such as **Bare-necked Umbrellabird, Three-wattled Bellbird, Azure-hooded Jay, Black-headed Antthrush, and Grey-throated Leaf-tosser** and will visit some of the most beautiful forest in Costa Rica.

Main tour

Itinerary (18 days/17 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in San Jose

You will arrive at Juan Santamaría International Airport in San José and be transferred to our nearby hotel with optional birding around the hotel grounds, depending on arrival time. Here we might find **Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Laughing Falcon, or Pearl Kite**. We will come together at 7 p.m. to meet each other and have dinner together.

Overnight: Hotel Robledal, San José

Day 2. San José to the Rio Tárcoles area

We will leave San José after breakfast for the Pacific lowlands. The Rio Tárcoles area marks the transition point between the humid rainforests of southwestern Costa Rica and the seasonally dry forests of the northwest of the country. Consequently, the avifauna here is particularly diverse, as birds from the wetter south and drier north mingle in a relatively small area. After checking into our hotel and having lunch we will concentrate our efforts on the mangroves and along the Rio Tárcoles via boat, where we will seek out species from the diminutive **American Pygmy Kingfisher** to the country-endemic **Mangrove Hummingbird**.

Overnight: Hotel Villa Lapas, Tárcoles

Day 3. Full day at Carara National Park

We will have a full day birding Carara National Park, home to a wide assortment of special birds, such as **Scarlet Macaw**, **Northern Royal Flycatcher**, and **White-whiskered Puffbird**, as well as regional endemics like **Orange-collared Manakin** and **Baird's Trogon**. There are plenty of great birds in and around the park, and we're bound to have a large list of species at the end of the day.

Overnight: Hotel Villa Lapas, Tárcoles

Day 4. Tárcoles area, travel to South Pacific Area

After another morning in the Tarcol area for some additional birding, we continue our journey to Esquinas Rainforest Lodge in the southwestern corner of Costa Rica. A few stops along the way are likely to provide a few new birds.

Overnight: Esquinas Rainforest Lodge, Golfito

Day 5. Full day at Esquinas Rainforest Lodge

Nestled within the rainforest fringing the nearby Golfo Dulce, Esquinas Rainforest Lodge offers a variety of lowland regional endemics Costa Rica shares only with westernmost Panama, known as Chiriqui endemics. By birding the grounds of the lodge in the early morning we should connect with many of these species: **Riverside Wren**, **Golden-naped Woodpecker**, **Charming Hummingbird**, **Fiery-billed Aracari**, **Black-cheeked Ant Tanager** (a Costa Rica endemic), and more. **Uniform Crane**, a widespread but normally very difficult forest rail, is also possible.

In the afternoon we visit sites away from the lodge for several more targets that follow this general theme, like **Veraguan Mango**, a bird with a tiny global distribution, and **Sapphire-throated Hummingbird**, which barely reaches into Costa Rica from Panama.

Overnight: Esquinas Rainforest Lodge, Golfito

Day 6. Birding Rincón de la Vieja National Park and the Ciudad Neily area

An early morning vigil from the well-known hanging bridge (canopy walkway) at Rincón de la Vieja National Park for canopy species may yield two highly-desirable regional endemics, the immaculate **Yellow-billed Cotinga** and the vibrant **Turquoise Cotinga**. We will also check some grassland areas nearby, where we search for **Ocellated Crane**, a species which will take effort and patience to see, while the forests higher up the mountain slopes harbor two sought-after regional endemics, **Costa Rican Brushfinch** and **Spot-crowned Euphonia**.

Overnight: Esquinas Rainforest Lodge, Golfito

Day 7. Transfer to Savegre Mountain Lodge via Tolomuco

We'll leave the Esquinas area in the morning and drive north toward the Savegre Mountain Lodge in the Cerro de la Muerte, stopping at sites en route for a trio of difficult, range-restricted hummingbirds, **White-tailed Emerald**, **Snowy-bellied Hummingbird**, and **White-crested Coquette**. As we pass through a couple of sites above the treeline we will make a few of stops in the páramo zone, where we hope to connect with several highland specialists, such as **Peg-billed Finch**, **Volcano Junco**, **Timberline Wren**, and **Fiery-throated Hummingbird**.

Overnight: Savegre Mountain Lodge, San Gerardo de Dota

Day 8. Full day in the Savegre Valley

Situated in misty, cool montane oak forest at about 7000 feet in elevation, the Savegre Valley contains some of Costa Rica's most sought-after birds, including many Chiriqui endemics. We'll look for a long list of mouth-watering specialties, which we hope to connect with during our time here. **Costa Rican Pygmy Owl, Dusky Nightjar, Sulphur-winged Parakeet, Ochraceous Pewee, Silvery-throated Jay, Flame-throated Warbler, Wrenthrush, Silvery-fronted Tapaculo, Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher, and Scintillant Hummingbird** are just some of the potential targets. The birding usually begins in earnest right around the gardens of the lodge, where one often sees the magnificent **Resplendent Quetzal**, a contender for the best-looking bird in the world.

Overnight: Savegre Mountain Lodge, San Gerardo de Dota

Day 9. The Savegre area and transfer to Tapantí National Park

After a final morning in the Savegre Valley we will travel to the mid-elevation of the Tapantí area. Tapantí National Park offers an interesting suite of birds such as **Black Guan** and **Prong-billed Barbet**, as well as several specialties like the unusual **Green-fronted Lancebill**, the glistening **Golden-browed Chlorophonia**, and the secretive **Sooty-faced Finch**.

Overnight: Hotel Tapantí Media Lodge, Orosi

Day 10. Rio Macho and Irazú Volcano

We will leave the Tapantí area for the stunning Irazú volcano via the Rio Macho Forest Reserve, where we'll stop for some birding. The volcano is home to two very rare and highly-sought species, **Unspotted Saw-whet Owl** and **Buffy-crowned Wood Partridge** as well as a range of other highland species. After our time birding here we'll drop down into the Caribbean lowlands into the La Selva area.

Overnight: La Quinta Sarapiquí Lodge, La Virgen

Day 11. Full day La Selva Biological Station

The famous La Selva Biological Station vies only with Carara National Park as the single most diverse birding site in Costa Rica in terms of overall species count. We will spend the full day birding along the amazing trail network, which is home to literally hundreds of bird species, including key specialties such as **Snowy Cotinga, Semiplumbeous Hawk, Great Curassow, Great Tinamou, Blue-chested Hummingbird, and Great Green Macaw**.

Overnight: La Quinta Sarapiquí Lodge, La Virgen

Day 12. Braulio Carillo National Park and area

Braulio Carillo National Park, established in the 1980s in part to protect Caribbean foothill forest, hosts a wide variety of species for us to target. Although there are few trails in this massive park, the Quebrada-Gonzalez trail is a decidedly rich and productive one. Fast-moving feeding flocks, usually led by **Black-faced Grosbeak**, can contain a host of desirable regional endemics, such as **Streak-crowned Antvireo, Black-and-yellow Tanager, and Blue-and-gold Tanager**. We will also keep a sharp eye out for **Lattice-tailed Trogon, White-ruffed Manakin, and Ornate Hawk-Eagle** away from such flocks. Down the road the abandoned El Tapir butterfly/garden/ecotourism venture offers opportunities to see two dainty, near-endemic hummingbirds, **Black-crested Coquette** and **Snowcap**.

Overnight: La Quinta Sarapiquí Lodge, La Virgen

Day 13. La Virgen to Arenal via La Paz Waterfall Gardens

We will gradually make our way between the La Selva lowlands and the stunning Arenal volcano. As we leave the La Selva area we will drop into the deep, forested gorge known as Colonia Virgen del Socorro. Here we will hope to encounter several specialties, such as the near-endemic **Sooty-faced Finch** and the mouse-like **Northern Nightingale-Wren**. Our lunch stop will be at La Paz Waterfall Gardens, which hosts a series of busy hummingbird feeders, where we'll watch out for the endemic **Coppery-headed Emerald**, and the near-endemic **Black-bellied Hummingbird**, while fruit feeders can attract charismatic and colorful species such as **Prong-billed Barbet**, **Blue-throated Toucanet**, **Montezuma Oropendola**, and a host of tanagers. In addition, this area can be very productive for raptors like **White** and **Barred Hawks**, which soar high on rising thermals as the day heats up. During the afternoon we'll complete our journey to the luxurious Arenal Observatory Lodge.

Overnight: Arenal Observatory Lodge & Spa, La Fortuna

Day 14. Full day in the Arenal area

We will dedicate this morning to search for the extraordinarily skulky **Thicket Antpitta**, which is more easily seen here than anywhere else in Costa Rica (or Central America). The excellent primary forest can also be productive for a host of other typically difficult species, and we will keep an ear out for **Song Wren**, **Spotted Antbird**, and others in the undergrowth. Within the canopy fruiting trees can attract a smorgasbord of colorful tanagers, including the rare **Rufous-winged Tanager**. If we are lucky, we may even see a **Lovely Cotinga** in these same trees.

Overnight: Arenal Observatory Lodge & Spa, La Fortuna

Day 15. Arenal to Caño Negro

After another morning birding around the Arenal area (the feeders here can sometimes hold some great birds such as **Emerald Tanager**, **Great Curassow**, and **Montezuma Oropendola**) we will continue north to the Caño Negro region, with a stop at the Medio Queso wetlands along the way to look for the normally secretive **Pinnated Bittern**. Caño Negro itself, a watery lowland of lush sloughs, marshes, and wooded countryside, features an abundance of herons, storks, raptors, and kingfishers. Targets during an evening birding session include **Striped Owl** and **Great Potoo**.

Overnight: Natural Lodge Caño Negro

Day 16. Caño Negro to Hacienda Solimar

This morning includes a boat ride in order to better seek out the special inhabitants of the Río Frío and Lago Caño Negro. **Nicaraguan Grackle**, a species that Costa Rica shares only with southernmost Nicaragua, inhabits the reedy vegetation, while bare snags over the water can host any of five different species of kingfishers, including **American Pygmy Kingfisher**. Quiet coves may also host the bizarre yet striking **Sungrebe**. Other targets include the fish-eating **Black-collared Hawk**, the localized **Spot-breasted Wren**, and the demure **Grey-headed Dove**.

In the afternoon we continue our journey toward Hacienda Solimar through the dry forests and wetlands of the Guanacaste region near the coast. The seasonal wetlands of this area host an impressive diversity and number of waterbirds, including the gigantic **Jabiru**. Near the bird-rich grounds of our lodge, Hacienda Solimar, we hope to connect with both **Pacific Screech Owl** and **Spectacled Owl** in the evening.

Overnight: Hacienda Solimar

Day 17. Hacienda Solimar to San José

The decidedly Central American avifauna of the seasonally dry forest of Guanacaste in northwestern Costa Rica shares strong affinities with that found north along the coast all the way to southern Mexico. During the morning we will dedicate considerable effort to observing many of these specialties, from the elusive **Thicket Tinamou** and **Lesser Ground Cuckoo** to the brash **White-throated Magpie-Jay** and **Streak-backed Oriole**.

After lunch those finishing the tour now will commence their journey back to San José, where the tour concludes. They will arrive in time for a final evening meal. Those continuing on the post-tour extension will continue to the Monteverde area. Details of the extension follow below.

Overnight: Hotel Robledal, San Jose

Day 18. Departure from San Jose

Departure from San Jose on your international flights home.

Extension to Monteverde/San Gerardo

This short extension to the Costa Rica Specialties Main Tour focuses on the birds found in the Monteverde/San Gerardo area of the country, such as **Bare-necked Umbrellabird**, **Three-wattled Bellbird**, **Azure-hooded Jay**, **Black-headed Antthrush**, and **Grey-throated Leaf-tosser** and will visit some of the most beautiful forest in Costa Rica. There is huge potential for a wide range of highly-sought species such as **Resplendent Quetzal**, **Lovely Cotinga**, **Blue-and-gold Tanager**, **Black Guan**, **Bare-shanked Screech Owl**, and **Scaled Antpitta**.

Itinerary (6 days/5 nights)**Day 1. Hacienda Solimar to Monteverde**

Morning as per day 17 of the main tour above. After lunch there will a transfer to Monteverde, and depending on the local weather conditions we will look for some nocturnal species tonight, such as **Mottled Owl** and **Bare-shanked Screech Owl**.

Overnight: Hotel Fonda Vela, Monteverde

Day 2. Santa Elena Cloud Forest Reserve

Encompassing approximately 730 acres, the Santa Elena Cloud Forest Reserve was established in 1992 through the combined initiatives of the Santa Elena Community High School and Canadian-based Youth Challenge International. During our day in and around this verdant reserve we will scan the moss-laden trees for regional endemics such as **Collared Whitestart**, **Black Guan**, and **Collared Trogon**, while also paying close attention to the trail ahead of us for secretive ground-dwelling species such as **Buff-fronted Quail-Dove** and **Black-breasted Wood Quail**. However, the true stars of this forest are the incomparably beautiful **Resplendent Quetzal**, a contender for most beautiful bird of the world, and the bizarre **Three-wattled Bellbird**, the source of a call that should ring throughout the cloud forest during this time of the year.

Overnight: Hotel Fonda Vela, Monteverde

Days 3 - 4. San Gerardo Biological Station

During the morning we'll walk to the San Gerardo Biological Station, which is at a slightly lower elevation than the neighboring Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve. We'll have a day and a half to explore the trails around this incredible forest. The species composition is naturally slightly different from that at Monteverde, and we will look for **Azure-hooded Jay**, **Black-headed Antthrush**, **Grey-throated Leaf-tosser**, **Lovely Cotinga**, and an assortment of other mid-elevation cloudforest specialties, while we will also keep an eye out for the rare and special **Bare-necked Umbrellabird**.

Overnights: San Gerardo Biological Station

Day 5. San Gerardo Biological Station to San José

We will spend the final morning down at the San Gerardo Biological Station, where we will continue to look for the area's specialties and maybe even find a special bird such as **Scaled Antpitta**, **Highland Tinamou**, or **Ochre-breasted Antpitta**.

After our last birding session of the extension we will travel back to San José for a final evening meal together.

Overnight: Hotel Robledal, San José

Day 6. Departure from San José

Departure from San Jose.

Main tour

Duration: 18 days

Group size: 6 – 9

Date: 28 March – 14 April 2021

Start: San Jose, Costa Rica

End: San Jose, Costa Rica

Price: US\$7638 per person sharing

Single supplement: US\$1367

Price includes:

Meals and drinking water during the tour (from breakfast on day 2 until breakfast on day 18)

Accommodation

Expert tour leader and local bird/wildlife guide fees

National park/birdwatching reserve entrance fees

All transport while on tour, including airport pick-up and drop-off, boat trips, etc.

Tolls

Price excludes:

Flights to/from San José International Airport

Meals and drinking water before/after tour as described above

Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls, etc.

Soft/alcoholic drinks

Camera permits
Personal insurance
Gratuities

Extension

Duration: 6 days
Group size: 6 – 9
Date: 13 – 18 April 2020
Start: Hacienda Solimar, Costa Rica
End: San José, Costa Rica

Price: US\$2341 per person sharing
Single supplement: US\$407

Price includes:

Meals and drinking water during tour (from lunch on day 1 until breakfast on day 6)
Accommodation
Expert tour leader and local bird/wildlife guide fees
National park/birdwatching reserve entrance fees
All transport while on tour, including airport pick-up and drop-off, boat trips, etc.
Tolls

Price excludes:

Flights to/from San Jose International Airport
Meals and drinking water before/after tour as described above
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls, etc.
Soft/alcoholic drinks
Camera permits
Personal insurance
Gratuities

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide to the one advertised due to tour scheduling.