



## COMPLETE COSTA RICA - BIRDING IN PARADISE

28 MARCH - 14 APRIL 2024



*Spot-breasted Oriole* is one of the many bright and beautiful birds that Costa Rica has to offer.

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!



*Resplendent Quetzal, surely one of the world's top birds (photo Kevin Easley)!*

This carefully designed Costa Rica birding itinerary targets many regional endemics as well as numerous must-see, charismatic species, such as **Resplendent Quetzal**, **Jabiru**, **Agami Heron**, **Sungrebe**, **King Vulture**, **Great Curassow**, **Scarlet and Great Green Macaws**, **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.

## Itinerary (18 days/17 nights)

### Day 1. Arrival in San José

You will arrive at Juan Santamaría International Airport in San José and be transferred to your nearby hotel. Depending on your arrival time, we can explore the hotel grounds where we might find **Ferruginous Pygmy Owl**, **Red-billed Pigeon**, **Inca Dove**, **Hoffmann's Woodpecker**, **Orange-chinned Parakeet**, **Rufous-backed Wren**, **Clay-colored Thrush**, **Melodious Blackbird**, **Buff-throated Saltator**, **Rufous-tailed Hummingbird**, and **Spot-breasted Oriole**. We will keep an eye out overhead for **Finsch's Parakeet**, **Laughing Falcon** and **Mottled Owl**, which are often seen in the garden. We will come together at 7 p.m. to meet each other and have our first dinner together.

Overnight: Hotel Bougainvillea, San Jose



*The attractive **Laughing Falcon** is often seen around San José.*

### Day 2. San José to Guacimo and Villa Lapas

We will leave San José after breakfast for the Pacific lowlands and spend several hours birding the dry deciduous forests of Guacimo. Here we will look for **White-throated Magpie-Jay**, **Cinnamon Hummingbird**, **Banded Wren**, **Turquoise-browed Motmot**, **Long-tailed Manakin**, **Lesser Greenlet**, **White-lored Gnatcatcher**, **Great-crested**, **Streaked** and **Nutting's Flycatchers**, **Greenish Elaenia**, **Blue Grosbeak**, **Yellow-green Vireo**, and **Black-headed Trogon**. With luck we could get our first encounters with **Double-striped Thick-knee**, and the secretive **Lesser Ground Cuckoo**. We may get views of raptors such as **Broad-winged** and **Zone-tailed Hawks** and even our first chances of seeing **White-tailed Kite** and **King Vulture**.



In the afternoon we will explore the area around Hotel Villa Lapas looking for **Painted Bunting**, **Fiery-billed Aracari**, **Red-capped Manakin**, **Crested Guan**, **Grey-headed Chachalaca**, **Green Honeycreeper**, **Golden-hooded**, **Grey-headed** and **White-shouldered Tanagers**, **Northern Mealy Amazon** and the splendid **Scarlet Macaw**.

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**, **White-whiskered Puffbird**, **Streak-chested Antpitta**, **Chestnut-backed Antbird**, **Red-capped** and **Blue-crowned Manakin**, **Great Tinamou**, **Sunbittern**, **Masked Tityra** 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 by the end of the day.

Overnight: Hotel Villa Lapas, Tárcoles



*The huge and brightly colored Scarlet Macaw.*

### Day 4. Tárcoles area, travel to Esquinas Rainforest Lodge

Today we will have a long but exciting day, starting with a boat trip along the Tárcoles River. 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 along the Rio Tárcoles from our boat, where we will seek out species such as **Green, Belted, Ringed, and American Pygmy Kingfishers, Snowy and Great Egrets, Tricolored, Little Blue and Boat-billed Herons, Anhinga, American White Ibis, Brown Pelican, Magnificent Frigatebird, Northern Jacana** and the Costa Rica endemic, **Mangrove Hummingbird**. Other targets will include **Bare-throated Tiger Heron, Roseate Spoonbill, Common Black Hawk, Mangrove Warbler, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird**, and with luck, **Double-striped Thick-knee**. Here we will also have the chance to find **American Crocodile** and **Common Basilisk**.

After our boat trip we will continue our journey with a long drive to Esquinas Rainforest Lodge in the southwestern corner of Costa Rica. A few stops along the way are likely to provide several new bird species.

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 that 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 including **Riverside Wren, Golden-naped Woodpecker, Charming Hummingbird, Fiery-billed Aracari, Baird's Trogon, Blue-black Grosbeak, Great Curassow, Spot-crowned Euphonia, Rufous Piha, Black-cheeked Ant Tanager** (a Costa Rica endemic), and many more.



*Costa Rica is famous for its toucans and aracarís, this one being a **Fiery-billed Aracari**.*

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 marginally crosses into southern Costa Rica from Panama.

Overnight: Esquinas Rainforest Lodge, Golfito

### Day 6. Birding Rincón Bridge

An early morning vigil from the well-known Rincón Bridge 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**, **Striped Cuckoo**, **Red-crowned** and **Red-rumped Woodpeckers**, **Double-toothed Kite**, **Pale-breasted Spinetail**, **White-winged Becard**, **Tawny-crowned** and **Scrub Greenlet**, **Thick-billed Seed Finch**, and **Morelet's**, and **Yellow-bellied Seedeaters**. The lodge flower gardens attract **Violet-headed Hummingbird** and **Stripe-throated Hermit** while in the evening, with luck, we could find the impressive **Striped Owl**.

Overnight: Esquinas Rainforest Lodge, Golfito

### Day 7. Transfer to Savegre Mountain Lodge

Today is mostly a travel day and after some final morning birding around the lodge, we will start the long drive north toward the Savegre Mountain Lodge in the Cerro de la Muerte, stopping at sites en route for any birding opportunities.

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 7,000 feet (2,133 meters) 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 specials, which we hope to connect with during our time here. We will have a predawn start to spend the first hour of the morning looking for the most-wanted **Resplendent Quetzal**. After breakfast we will explore the forest above the lodge to look for regional endemics such as **Flame-throated Warbler**, **Yellow-thighed Brushfinch**, **Large-footed Finch**, **Black-faced Solitaire**, **Spot-crowned Woodcreeper**, **Ruddy Treerunner**, **Buffy Tuftedcheek**, **Black-cheeked Warbler**, **Spotted Wood Quail**, **Ochraceous Wren**, **Sooty-capped Bush Tanager**, **Collared Whitestart**, and with luck, the secretive **Silvery-fronted Tapaculo**.

After lunch we will leave the lodge and visit the feeders at Miriam's restaurant to enjoy views of **Acorn Woodpecker**, **Blue-throated Toucanet**, **Hairy Woodpecker**, **Yellow-thighed Brushfinch**, **Sooty-capped Bush Tanager**, **Large-footed Finch**, and hummingbirds including **Grey-tailed Mountaingem**, and **Volcano**, **Talamanca** and **Fiery-throated Hummingbirds**. At dusk we will try for **Dusky Nightjar** and **Bare-shanked Screech Owl**.

Overnight: Savegre Mountain Lodge, San Gerardo de Dota





*The immaculate Spotted Wood Quail (photo Paul Newman).*

#### **Day 9. The Savegre area, Paraiso Los Quetzales and transfer to Orocay**

We will leave the lodge and look for some specials such as the monotypic **Wrenthrush**, and then drive up the mountains to the famous antennas birding spot to look for **Timberline Wren**, and **Volcano Junco**. The open high grounds are also good areas to spot **Red-tailed Hawks**. Then we will descend to Paraiso Los Quetzales Lodge where we will enjoy the feeders with species such as **Volcano**, **Talamanca**, and **Fiery-throated Hummingbirds**. Other targets include **Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush**, **Black-thighed Grosbeak**, **Spangled-cheeked Tanager**, **Black-capped Flycatcher**, and the most-wanted **Black-and-yellow Phainoptila** and **Golden-browed Chlorophonia**. We will then drive towards Paraiso and check coffee plantations for **Cabanis's Ground Sparrow**.

Overnight: Paraíso Orocay Lodge

#### **Day 10. Rio Macho and transfer to Sarapiquí**

Today we will explore the Rio Macho Forest Reserve which is a nice stop on our way to Sarapiquí. Here we will look for **White-eared Ground Sparrow**, **Golden-browed Chlorophonia**, **Specked Tanager**, **Brown Jay**, **Rufous-browed Peppershrike**, **White-winged Tanager**, **Spectacled Whitestart**, **Black-headed Saltator**, **Yellow-faced Grassquit**, **Slaty Antwren**, **Boat-billed**, **Grey-capped** and **Piratic Flycatchers**, **Masked Tityra**, **Tropical Parula**, **Brown-capped Vireo**, **Chestnut-headed Oropendola** and with luck, the rare and seldom-seen **Azure-hooded Jay**. 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



*The attractive **Great Curassow** can be seen at La Selva Biological Station.*

### Day 11. La Selva Biological Station and Sarapiquí outskirts

We will spend the morning birding the famous La Selva Biological Station, birding along the amazing trail network, which is home to literally hundreds of bird species, including key specials such as **Snowy Cotinga**, **Semiplumbeous Hawk**, **Rufous-winged Woodpecker**, **Rufous** and **Broad-billed Motmots**, **Black-cowled Oriole**, **Black-faced Grosbeak**, **Fasciated Antshrike**, **Cinnamon Becard**, **Cocoa Woodcreeper**, **Plain-colored Tanager**, **Bluish-fronted Jacamar**, **Gartered Trogon**, **Yellow-throated** and **Keel-billed Toucans**, **Red-lored Amazon**, **Brown-hooded Woodpecker**, **Buff-rumped Warbler**, **Red-throated Ant Tanager**, and the fantastic **Chestnut-colored Woodpecker**. Occasionally it is possible to see **Crested Owl** and **Vermiculated Screech Owl** at their daytime roosts and if we're really lucky, we may catch a glimpse of **Great** and **Slaty-breasted Tinamous** as they cross the trails.

We will leave the biological station before noon to return to our lodge for lunch. During the afternoon we will explore the Sarapiquí surroundings in search of **Great Green Macaw**.

Overnight: La Quinta Sarapiquí Lodge, La Virgen

### Day 12. Tapirus Lodge, Butterfly House and Cope

Today we will explore the forest around Tapirus Lodge in search of bird species such as **Carmioli's** and **Tawny-crested Tanagers**, and with luck, **Lattice-tailed Trogon**. The area is great for raptors and, with a sunny day, it is possible to see species such as **Black Hawk-Eagle** and **White Hawk** which soar high overhead on rising thermals as the day heats up. The area is also a good place to find **Bare-necked Umbrellabird** which remain in the lowlands at this time of the year, before



undertaking an altitudinal migration into the mountains. Other excellent species which have been seen on our tours here include **Tiny Hawk** while the area also holds **Baird's Tapir** which is habituated to the lodge with wild individuals sometimes seen along forest trails.

Later we will check the famous butterfly house to look for hummingbirds including the spectacular and most-wanted **Snowcap** but also **Violet-headed Hummingbird**, **Green Thorntail** and, if we're lucky, **Black-crested Coquette**.

Finally we are going to visit Cope, where we will enjoy bird feeders which attract many **Red-legged Honeycreepers** (at eye-level) as well as **Green** and **Shining Honeycreepers** in fewer numbers. Other species to be seen in the area include **Collared Aracari**, **Montezuma Oropendola**, **Orange-chinned Parakeet**, **Crimson-collared Tanager**, **Pale-vented Pigeon**, **Rufous-naped Wood Rail**, **Red-winged Blackbird**, and **Giant Cowbird**. Birding in the forest near Cope provides excellent chances for the spectacular **Crested** and **Spectacled Owls** while sometimes it is possible to find **Great Potoo** at its daytime roost.

Overnight: La Quinta Sarapiquí Lodge, La Virgen



*We should find a number of owl species on this trip such as this young **Spectacled Owl**.*

### **Day 13. La Virgen to Arenal, via Cinchona feeders and La Paz Waterfall Gardens**

Today 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 hope to encounter **American Dipper**, **Northern Tufted Flycatcher**, **Scale-crested Pygmy Tyrant**, **Golden-winged Warbler** and **Emerald Tanager**.

Our next port of call will be the Cinchona feeders where we hope to find **Prong-billed Barbet**, **Blue-throated Toucanet**, **Red-headed Barbet**, and **Silver-throated Tanager** at eye level. With luck, we could find **Buff-fronted Quail-Dove** and **Black Guan**.



*We'll look for **Montezuma Oropendola** at La Paz Waterfall Gardens.*

Our lunch stop will be at La Paz Waterfall Gardens, which hosts a series of busy hummingbird feeders, where we'll look out for the endemic **Coppery-headed Emerald**, the near-endemic **Black-bellied Hummingbird** as well as **Purple-throated Mountaingem**, **Violet Sabrewing**, and **Purple-crowned Fairy** all hovering in the flowers around the gardens. In addition, this area can be very productive for species such as **Spotted Barbtail**, **Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush**, **Sooty-faced Finch**, and **Black-eared Warbler**. Later, in the afternoon we will complete our journey to the comfortable 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 army ant swarms which sometimes attract the most-wanted **Rufous-vented Ground Cuckoo** and **Ocellated Antbird**. Even though it is not guaranteed to find the ants, we should have some nice encounters with other attractive species such as **Thicket Antpitta**, **Song Wren**, **Spotted Antbird**, **Stripe-breasted Wren**, **Golden-crowned Warbler** and with luck, we may find the difficult **Blue-and-gold Tanager**.

The gardens are a good place to find **Black-crested Coquette**, **Long-tailed Tyrant**, **Golden-olive Woodpecker** and **Great Curassow**. The fruit feeders attract **Emerald Tanager** and **Bay-headed**,

**Silver-throated, Blue-grey, Palm, and Scarlet-rumped Tanagers.** In the afternoon we will focus our efforts on finding **Keel-billed Motmot** and **White-fronted Nunbird**.

Overnight: Arenal Observatory Lodge & Spa, La Fortuna

### Day 15. Arenal to Caño Negro via Medio Queso

Our last morning will take us to the Arenal Skyline where we will have a few hours to look for some specials such as **Thicket Antpitta**, **Half-collared Gnatwren**, **Sharpbill**, and if we are lucky, **Yellow-eared Toucanet** and **Ornate Hawk-Eagle**. Then we will start the long drive to Caño Negro, with a stop in Medio Queso wetlands where we will have our second boat trip of the tour. This time we will focus on specials such as **Pinnated** and **Least Bitterns**, **Nicaragua Grackle**, **Nicaraguan Seed Finch**, **Yellow-breasted Crake**, **Sora**, **Slaty Spinetail** and **Canebrake Wren** which we all have great chances of seeing. Later we will continue the drive to our lodge in Caño Negro where we will arrive at around dusk.

Overnight: Natural Lodge Caño Negro

### Day 16. Caño Negro to La Ensenada

This morning our final boat ride of the trip will take us out to look for species such as **Green Ibis**, the most-wanted **Sungrebe**, **Spot-breasted Wren**, **Green-and-rufous Kingfisher**, **Boat-billed Heron**, **Black-collared Hawk**, and with luck **Bare-crowned Antbird** and the most-wanted **Agami Heron**.



*We hope to see **Sungrebe** on one of our boat cruises in Costa Rica (Paul Newman).*



In the afternoon we continue our journey toward La Ensenada along the shores of the Pacific Ocean surrounded by dry forests and wetlands of the Guanacaste region. The seasonal wetlands and mangroves in the area host some interesting species such as the endemic **Mangrove Hummingbird** as well as **Mangrove Warbler**, **Mangrove Cuckoo**, **Black-necked Stilt**, **Western** and **Semipalmated Sandpipers**, **Semipalmated Plover**, **Southern Lapwing**, **Wood Stork**, **Black-bellied Whistling Duck**, **Blue-winged Teal**, and **Yellow-crowned Night Heron**.

Overnight: La Ensenada Lodge



*Mangrove Cuckoo is one of a suite of mangrove specials that we'll be looking for.*

### Day 17. La Ensenada Lodge to San José

The Central American avifauna of the seasonally dry forests of Guanacaste in northwestern Costa Rica share strong affinities to the bird assemblages found further north along the coast to southern Mexico. In the morning we will dedicate considerable effort to look for the secretive **Lesser Ground Cuckoo**. Other birds here include **Pacific Screech Owl**, **Stripe-headed Sparrow**, **Banded Wren**, **Black-headed Trogon**, **Plain-capped Starthroat**, **Cinnamon Hummingbird**, **Common Ground** and **Inca Doves**, **Banded Wren**, **Rose-throated Becard**, **Panama Flycatcher**, **White-throated Magpie-Jay** and many others that we may have seen in Guacimo on Day 2.

After lunch we will continue with the journey back to San José, where the tour concludes and we will enjoy our final evening meal and reflect on what is likely to have been an incredible Costa Rica birding tour.

Overnight: Hotel Robledal, San José

**Day 18. Departure from San José**

Departure from San José on your international flights home.

*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 from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.*

**Duration:** 18 days  
**Group size:** 6 – 9  
**Dates:** 28 March - 14 April 2024  
**Start:** San José, Costa Rica  
**End:** San José, Costa Rica  
**Prices:** US\$8,646 per person sharing (2024)  
**Single Supplements:** US\$1,387 (2024)

**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  
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls, etc.  
Soft/alcoholic drinks  
Camera permits  
Personal insurance  
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))