



COSTA RICA PREMIUM TOUR

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 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.

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. Here 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 **White-tailed Kite**, which are often seen flying over the garden. We will come together at 7 p.m. to meet each other and have dinner together.

Overnight: Hotel Robledal, San José



*The attractive **Laughing Falcon** is often seen around 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 along the Rio Tárcoles via boat, where we will seek out species from the diminutive **American Pygmy Kingfisher** to the country-endemic **Mangrove Hummingbird**. Other targets will include **Bare-throated Tiger Heron**, **Roseate Spoonbill**, **American White Ibis**, **Brown Pelican**,

Magnificent Frigatebird, Northern Jacana and with luck, **Double-striped Thick-knee**. Here you will also have the chance to find **American Crocodile**. \$\$\$

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 Manakin, 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 at 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

After another morning in the Tárcoles 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



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

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**, 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

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 any birding opportunities. As we pass through a couple of sites above the treeline we will make a few 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 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 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



Gartered Trogon is yet another brightly colored delight of Costa Rica.

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: Paraíso Orocaý Lodge

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



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

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.

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 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 of fruiting trees we could find 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



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

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 San Joaquín

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 San Joaquín 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 San Joaquín, we hope to connect with both **Pacific Screech Owl** and **Spectacled Owl** in the evening.

Overnight: Hacienda San Joaquín



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

Day 17. Hacienda San Joaquin 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 we will continue with the journey back to San José, where the tour concludes and we will enjoy our final evening meal.

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](#))