

## Costa Rica Special Adventure and Honeymoon (Premium) Dossier

Discover the Central American paradise of Costa Rica, from cloud forests that cover the slopes of towering volcanoes to shimmering lagoons, from mangrove forests teeming with brilliant birds and wildlife to pristine beaches where the offshore reefs open up a whole new world of undersea life. This is a land of remarkable beauty where no two days are ever alike.

### Highlights

- Take a boat through the Tortuguero National Park
- Observe wildlife from a tree-top canopy walkway
- Explore the active Arenal Volcano
- Experience the Cloud Forest of Monteverde
- Relax on brilliant white Pacific beaches



### Factfile

**Transfers** Airport transfers on arrival and departure.

**Escorted** Services of local representatives in San Jose. Tours by English-speaking guide and transfers by

Spanish-speaking drivers.

**Transport** Private air-conditioned vehicles, mini-van and boat to/from Tortuguero NP.

**Activities** Extensive trail walking in National Parks, tour to Poas Volcano and La Paz waterfalls, water excursions in Tortuguero, wildlife spotting.

**Accommodation** 13 nights unique hotels and lodges.

**Entrance Fees** Included on Poas Volcano and La Paz Waterfall Gardens. Not included for National Parks (7-12 US\$ each)

**Meals** As per itinerary.

B - Breakfast, L - Lunch, D - Dinner.

## Itinerary

### DAY 1 - SAN JOSE

Arrive at Juan Santa Maria International Airport and transfer to your hotel.

Upon arrival at the airport, please look for our representative who will be holding a sign with either your name or 'Imaginative Traveller' on it.

#### **Hotel Grano de Oro**

Hotel Grano de Oro is a sanctuary in the heart of bustling San José. Converted from a tropical Victorian mansion, the hotel maintains the warmth and comfort of a private home. The hotel's charming atrium terrace and corridors have sparkling fountains and lush tropical plants, and the rooftop deck offers soothing jacuzzis and secluded sunbathing spots.

### DAY 2 - POAS VOLCANO – LA PAZ WATERFALLS

An early start this morning to visit Poas Volcano. Today you will also visit La Paz Waterfall Gardens, a Nature Park where you walk on truly spectacular trails that will lead to Magia Blanca Falls (the largest and the most spectacular of the falls in the area), and also visit the largest enclosed butterfly observatory in the world. After lunch return to the hotel. (BL)

#### **Poas Volcano**

At almost 1.5km across and 300m deep, the crater of the Poas Volcano is the second largest in the world and is situated at an altitude of 2,708m in the heart of the Parque Nacional Volcan Poas. The volcano is the most visited protected site in Costa Rica and is named after a small yellow flower that grows at the summit. Framed by tropical forests, the still-active crater steams gently. In a long history of eruptions, the worst arrived on January 25th 1910, when Poas spewed 640,000 tons of ash, rocks and lava into the air, bombarding the surrounding area with debris.

The surrounding National Park has various landscape types displaying the huge range of biodiversity Costa Rica has to offer, incorporating areas of scarce vegetation, cloud forest and an area of stunted forest, where the growth of the tough ferns and bonsai-type trees is limited by the acid rain emanating from the volcano. However, wildlife still thrives here amongst the vegetation and the park is home to the Poas squirrel which, as the name suggests, is not found anywhere else in the world.

### DAY 3 - SAN JOSE – TORTUGUERO NATIONAL PARK

Transfer by land and boat to one of the most exotic regions in Costa Rica, Tortuguero National Park. In the afternoon you will explore the many waterways of the park with a specialist guide, searching for the abundant flora and fauna including orchids, birds, monkeys, crocodiles, toucans and so on. Overnight at a beautiful lodge in this wildlife sanctuary. (BLD)

#### **Tortuguero National Park**

Only accessible by either boat or plane, and encompassing 290km<sup>2</sup> of Caribbean lowland rainforest, the Parque Nacional Tortuguero is home to an abundance of extraordinary flora and fauna. It is the most important Atlantic

nesting site for two species of turtle, the green and the leatherback, which lay their eggs on the beach from July to September. The park is also home to three species of monkey, the spider, howler and white-faced as well as manatees, jaguar, ocelot, peccary, tapir, sloth and over 300 species of birds.

#### **Tortuguero Lodges**

The lodges at Tortuguero are nestled in the rainforest and provide an ideal hideaway for nature lovers. With lush gardens and rustic-style accommodation, there is plenty of opportunity to relax and listen to the sound of the jungle.

#### **Manatus Lodge**

The Manatus Lodge enjoys a peaceful location amongst the trees on the edge of the main canal of Tortuguero National Park. Rooms are beautifully presented with an immaculate attention to detail. Food is delicious, there is an abundance of fresh flowers and the service is superb.

## **DAY 4 - TORTUGUERO NATIONAL PARK**

After breakfast you will enjoy a further boat tour of the park. The rest of the day is free to relax. From July to September it may be possible to visit the beaches where sea turtles lay their eggs. (BLD)

## **DAY 5 - TORTUGUERO – LA FORTUNA**

Transfer by boat and land to La Fortuna, an excellent base for exploring Arenal Volcano National Park. Arenal Volcano is the quintessential active volcano, producing ash columns, explosions and red lava on an almost daily basis. Overnight at Montana de Fuego resort with superb views of the volcano. (B)

#### **Arenal Volcano & La Fortuna**

150km from San José, on the northern plains of Costa Rica, the Arenal Volcano is one of the most active volcanoes in the world. Dormant for 400 years until finally erupting in 1968, the volcano emits an almost daily burst of glowing rocks, spiralling ash columns and red hot lava. The small town of Fortuna huddles in the shadow of the looming volcano and is the perfect base for exploring the area and watching the natural firework display emanating from the crater.

There are a variety of other things to visit in the region, including the Baldi Thermae hot springs and the Rio Fortuna waterfall, a 70m tumbling cascade.

#### **Montaña de Fuego Hotel**

The hotel is a peaceful oasis close to the Arenal Volcano and offering spectacular views of it. Individual bungalows are situated in lush gardens full of indigenous flora and fauna.

## **DAY 6 - LA FORTUNA**

A free day to enjoy the many natural wonders of this area: hike through the surrounding rainforest, kayak on Arenal Lake, ride horses to the volcano or alternatively relax at Tabacon Hot Springs, where a hot volcanic stream is channelled into five pools of varying temperature. (B)

## **DAY 7 - MONTEVERDE CLOUD FOREST RESERVE**

Drive around beautiful Lake Arenal towards Monteverde. A beautiful park that teems with flora and fauna of every description, Monteverde has gained international renown as one of the most outstanding wildlife sanctuaries in the tropics. Overnight at El Establo Lodge. (B)

#### **Monteverde Cloud Forest**

Located 6km south-east of Santa Elena de Monteverde and straddling the Continental divide, Monteverde cloud forest is amongst the most precious natural environments in the country and is described as Costa Rica's 'Jewel in the Crown'. The clouds of mist that cloak the tropical forest produce a variable climate which, combined with the

altitude, have resulted in an array of exotic flora and fauna. This includes the quetzal, widely regarded as the most beautiful bird in the western hemisphere with its scarlet chest plumage and long green tail feathers. Other colourful species include the bare-necked umbrella bird and the three-wattled bellbird. Jaguar are also present, although seldom seen. Altogether Monteverde Cloud Park has over 2,500 plant and 6,000 insect species, many of which are unique to Costa Rica.

#### **El Establo Lodge**

El Establo Lodge is located in the heart of the conservation area of Monteverde, within walking distance of the Butterfly Garden & the Ecological Farm. Set on a private farm adjacent to the Monteverde Reserve, there are numerous nature trails leading from the hotel and fabulous views over the surrounding scenery.

## **DAY 8 - MONTEVERDE CLOUD FOREST**

A full day to explore the reserve, following trails that wind through the most spectacular sections. There is abundant wildlife and we hope to spot the colourful quetzal bird as well as a variety of monkeys, wild cats and reptiles. (B)

## **DAY 9 TO DAY 10 - PACIFIC COAST**

After breakfast transfer to the charming Villa Caletas on the Pacific Coast where you have two days to relax. (B)

#### **Villa Caletas**

Inspired by French colonial architecture, Villa Caletas exudes old world charm and its setting on top of a cliff ensures spectacular views over the gulf islands of the Nicoya Peninsula. There is a truly magnificent infinity pool and all the rooms are delightfully fitted out.

## **DAY 11 TO DAY 12 - MANUEL ANTONIO NATIONAL PARK**

Short drive to Manuel Antonio National Park. The National Park combines an intoxicating mix of beaches, offshore islands and lush rainforest with the opportunity for close encounters with monkeys, sloth and an abundance of birds. Overnight at splendid La Mariposa Hotel. (B)

#### **Manuel Antonio National Park**

Situated 7km from the town of Quepos, Manuel Antonio is Costa Rica's smallest national park, yet one of its most beautiful with an almost unequalled diversity of wildlife. Three stunning beaches are set against a backdrop of emerald rainforest which is home to sloth, iguana, the rare and adorable squirrel monkey and millions of colorful little crabs. There is also excellent snorkeling on the coral reefs just beyond the beach.

Much of the park can be visited on foot, with beautiful trails winding through the forest, crossing the picturesque white sand of the coast and up to the top of Cathedral point, whose forested cliffs afford spectacular views.

#### **Hotel La Mariposa**

Hotel La Mariposa is an award-winning resort, best known for its stunning 360° views of the Pacific Ocean, Manuel Antonio National Park and the surrounding tropical vegetation. With its Spanish-Mediterranean architecture and well appointed rooms, La Mariposa is sophisticated yet intimate; it offers three swimming pools with great ocean views and meticulously landscaped tropical gardens featuring walkways and trails.

## **DAY 13 - SAN JOSE**

Drive back to San Jose. (B)

#### **Xandari Resort**

Xandari Resort & Spa consists of 22 individually designed and spacious villas nestled on a 40 acre coffee and fruit plantation overlooking Costa Rica's Central Valley. Each villa is surrounded by gardens and is adorned with original works of art with a private terrace, a walled-in sun area and a bar kitchen. The food is of the highest

quality, with much of the produce coming from the on-site organic greenhouse, orchards and gardens. There are peaceful walks through gardens dotted with sculpture and over 4 kilometers of private scenic trails through the surrounding hills with views of dramatic waterfalls.

## DAY 14 - SAN JOSE

Transfer to Juan Santa Maria International airport in time for your departure. (B)

# Supplementary Information

### Staffing

In San Jose you will have the services of an English speaking local representative. During the rest of the itinerary, tours will be accompanied by an English speaking guide and transfers will be with a Spanish speaking driver.

### Hotels

We have selected a lovely range of accommodation in Costa Rica, specifically chosen to enhance your stay. Whilst each hotel retains its own character, they all offer excellent service and international standards of cuisine.

All of the hotels that we have listed in the itinerary will be booked subject to availability. If we are unable to secure a booking at the selected hotel we will suggest a suitable alternative; however please be aware that some of the places that we visit have only a limited selection of accommodation and the alternative may not be of equivalent standard. Where this is the case, we may be able to offer a small discount off the cost of the trip to reflect the lower standard. Please discuss this with your travel consultant at the time of booking, if appropriate.

We offer both a standard and premium level holiday; in the itinerary above we have given details of the hotels used for each level. Where only one hotel has been listed, the premium level trip will use a higher class of room.

### Transport

**Road** - All transfers and tours will be in air-conditioned vehicles. On day 2, the excursion to Poas Volcano will be in a coach and the vehicle used to transfer to Tortuguero National Park will be provided by the hotel and therefore may have other guests on board. All other excursions are in private vehicles.

**Local Transport** - Taxis are recommended for most journeys in San José. All taxis should have a meter but it's a good idea to be aware of what the approximate price should be before getting in the taxi.

### Visas & Taxes

Nationals of the UK, Canada and the US do not require a visa to enter Costa Rica and can stay as visitors for up to 90 days. Australian and New Zealand nationals also do not require a visa and can stay as visitors for up to 30 days.

Most other nationalities can obtain a visa on arrival but you should confirm this with your local Costa Rican Embassy or Consulate.

All nationalities must ensure that their passports are valid for up to 3 months from the time of entry into Costa Rica.

You will probably be asked to fill out an immigration card. A copy of this card should stay in your passport until you exit the country.

There is a departure tax of US\$26 payable at the airport.

### Travel Insurance

Fully comprehensive travel insurance is compulsory for all travellers. We recommend that you take out insurance to cover cancellation and curtailment, baggage loss or damage, medical expenses, emergency travel, repatriation and personal accident, before you leave home. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are fully insured to financially safeguard against unforeseen circumstances.

## **Money**

The monetary unit in Costa Rica is the Colon (C). Approximate exchange rates (as at October 2007) are as follows:

1 Pound Sterling: 1080 C

1 US Dollar: 530 C

1 Euro: 752 C

XE.com is a useful site for currency conversion.

## **Changing Money, Credit Cards & ATMs**

We recommend that you bring cash/travellers cheques in US Dollars. These can be changed at Change Houses (Casas de Cambio), banks and border crossings and it is best to change money into colons as soon as you arrive. Although purchases can be made in US\$ it is generally favourable to pay in local currency.

There is no restriction on the amount of foreign currency that you may bring into Costa Rica, however very large sums should be declared on arrival.

ATM machines (cajeros automaticos) are available in San José, and accept most major cards i.e. Visa, Plus and Cirrus/Maestro. Finding an ATM that will accept your card in the rest of Costa Rica however, can be difficult.

Important Note: There have been problems reported with the use of Mastercard in Costa Rica, so please do not rely on this type of card.

Cash advances are available from the bank with visa cards. Most banks will request to see your passport. Credit cards are also accepted in major outlets however authorisation is sometimes denied due to poor computer connections. In addition commission will often be charged on these transactions.

Remember that once out of Costa Rica you will generally not be able to use or exchange colones (except at the border towns). Therefore you must make sure you spend/exchange/donate any left over money before leaving the country.

## **Entrance fees**

Entrance fees are included for both Poas Volcano and also La Paz Waterfall gardens. However, entrance fees for other national parks are not included and need to be paid locally. These are not expensive – generally US\$10-12 per person. There are also some optional excursions that you may want to enjoy;

- Excursion to the turtle beaches on day 4 (when in season). Cost is approx. US\$25 per person and should be arranged locally
- Tours in Monteverde (days 7-8) – there are a range of options at different costs. If you allow US\$65 per person this should be plenty.

## **Tipping**

Tipping is discretionary. Usually restaurants will add a service charge automatically to the bill but if this is not the case, you should add approximately 10% for waiting staff. Taxi drivers generally don't receive tips. Porters and hotel staff can be given a few dollars for their services.

## **Voltage and Plug Sockets**

The voltage in Costa Rica is 110 Volts.

Sockets are of the US style two pronged variety.

## **Meals & Drinks**

There is a lot of different food to choose from in Costa Rica. Local cuisine is simple, tasty and not too spicy, but can be heavy on the oil at times! 'Gallo pinto', the national dish of fried rice and black beans is commonly served with breakfast. A gallo pinto made in coconut milk (on the Caribbean side of the country) is particularly good.

At lunch gallo pinto becomes 'casado', rice and beans supplemented with cabbage and tomato salad, fried plantains, (sweet bananas), and meat. Other common meals include 'arroz con pollo' (rice with chicken) and 'arroz con atun' (with tuna). Vegetables do not form a large part of the diet, but salad is usually provided.

Costs

As a guideline a simple snack (e.g. a sandwich) can cost as little as US\$0.60, and a cheap local meal will cost around US\$1.50-3. A meal in one of the best restaurants in San José costs very little in comparison to what you

would expect to pay at home (usually around US\$15-30) but this will obviously depend on what you order and if you have wine or other drinks. In cheaper restaurants (called Sodas) you can get meals for as little as US\$1.50.

### **Drinks**

You should be wary of drinking the local tap water, especially in small towns. Bottled water and carbonated soft drinks are widely available. If you want still bottled water ask for 'agua natural, sin gas' (no gas).

Costa Rican fruit is really fresh and cheap. There are many juice stands that serve delicious 'batido de fruta' (fruit smoothies). Always specify if you don't want sugar ('sin azucar') as Latin Americans have a very sweet tooth and normally add sugar automatically to drinks.

The best tea and coffee is unfortunately generally exported, so it is surprisingly difficult to get a good cuppa in Costa Rica. Coffee is served very strong with hot milk, and teabags are served in a cup of hot milk unless you ask for 'leche fria seperado' (cold milk on the side)

There are countless lagers and a few dark beers in Costa Rica. The most common are Bavaria and Imperial.

Costa Rica has no national drink, but 'horchata', a cinnamon flavoured cornmeal drink, is a favourite of the locals.

The following is a guideline for costs for drinks bought in a shop in the street. Prices in restaurants and hotels will usually be more than double the prices specified below:

- 1 litre of water - US\$1
- 30cl bottle of soft drink - US\$1
- 30cl bottle of beer - US\$1.50
- 50cl bottle of beer - US\$2

### **Vegetarians**

If you are a strict vegetarian you may experience a distinct lack of variety in the food available, especially in small towns. You might find that you are eating a lot of omelettes, rice and beans, or salad dishes.

### **Clothing**

On your trip you will pass through the mountains, the beach and the temperate central valleys, which will mean a wide variety of temperatures and weather. Whilst it is generally hot year round on the coast, in the mountains it can get cold and misty and you should come prepared. We recommend that you bring layers so that you can add them and take them off quickly and easily.

Water resistant jackets and trousers are particularly useful during the rainy season from June to November but can come in handy all year round.

### **Health**

You should consult your doctor about what vaccinations are required for travel to Costa Rica and check whether they recommend the use of malarial prophylactics.

### **Haggling**

Haggling is no longer particularly common in Costa Rica, and prices are fixed in most hotels and shops. However you can always try some gentle negotiating to see if you are able to get the price down a little bit – as long as you are polite, no offence will be caused. The one exception to this is the local outdoor markets, where people do haggle and you can certainly join in !

### **Safety**

Crime in Latin America is not as bad as its reputation makes out, as long as you are sensible and alert. Costa Rica is one of the safer countries but like anywhere in the world you can be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Care should be taken, especially when walking around the larger cities. Try to keep away from dark quiet areas, particularly late at night. We suggest that whenever possible you leave your important documents in a safe ('caja fuertes') however you should always carry some form of ID or a photocopy of your passport.

It is advisable not to wear expensive looking watches or jewellery and don't carry a wallet in your back pocket or carry loose hanging bags. Keep your camera concealed when not in use. Remember that most thieves don't use violence but rely mostly on diversionary tactics which can take place at anytime of the day or night. Do not be

paranoid, but just be aware that something could happen at anytime. If you are always vigilant, the chances are that nothing will ever happen to you.

## General information

### Communications

**Email** - As with almost everywhere these days, the easiest and cheapest form of communication is via the internet. You will find internet cafes in every major Cost Rican town/city. The average cost is approx. US\$1 per hour. Connection is generally slower and prices higher in the smaller more remote places.

**Phone** - For international calls you can buy a local phone card 'tarjeta de telefono'. These are readily available in San José and can be used from any phone in Costa Rica. There are '199' and '197' cards. You just dial these numbers, enter the code on the back of the card and dial the number you wish to call. As an example, a 3000 colones card (US\$7) will give you approx 10 minutes talk time to the UK.

### Cameras and Film

Camera film is widely available in Costa Rica but it is expensive and frequently may have expired. We therefore recommend that you bring film from home.

If you have a digital camera you should ensure that you bring an adequate supply of memory cards to cover the entire trip.

We also strongly recommend that you bring a couple of zip-loc freezer bags to keep your camera in, to protect it from the rain and damp.

### Weather

The weather in Costa Rica can be roughly divided into the dry season (December to May) when it is usually warm, and the wet season (June to November) when it is still warm on the coast but can be cool in the mountains. However, it can rain at any time of year (and in the rain and cloud forest, it will often rain every day) so you should be prepared for sunshine, rain, cool mountain breezes and chilly mountain mists !

### Suggested Reading

#### Guidebooks

- National Geographic Traveler – Costa Rica
- Frommer's Costa Rica

#### Wildlife and Nature

- Costa Rica (Traveller's Wildlife Guides) (by Les Beletsky)
- Tropical Nature: Life and Death in the Rain Forests of Central and South America (by Adrian Forsyth and Ken Miyata)

#### General

- Costa Rica: The Last Country The Gods Made (by Adrian Colesberry and Brass McLean)
- The Ticos: Culture and Social Change in Costa Rica (by Mavis Hiltunen Biesanz, Richard Biesanz and Karen Zubris Biesanz)

### Contact Details

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