



# Costa Rica

## A Trove of Tropical Birds—and More

January 31-February 12, 2025

Leaders: Stephanie Mason & Eddie Recio

For more than 30 years our members have traveled to Costa Rica on trips we have sponsored. Talk to any and you'll probably hear similar stories. They'll talk of this little country's natural beauty and its friendly, hospitable residents. You'll hear about great sightings of gorgeous birds, from toucans, parrots, and motmots to the incomparable Resplendent Quetzal, showiest member of the trogon family. Perhaps the conversation will turn to the wonder of seeing monkeys, iguanas, or sloths in the treetops, or tiny red and blue poison-arrow frogs hopping blithely across the forest floor.



Our basic itinerary visits a variety of habitats: from classic lowland rainforest at La Selva to moist Caribbean slope at Rancho Naturalista to the vast wetlands of Cano Negro to the lovely cloud forest of Bosque de Paz.

Costa Rica is a small Central American country whose natural areas support a dazzling variety of tropical wildlife. Land area is about the same as West Virginia (which is about the same as Vermont & New Hampshire combined), yet the country's bird list is nearly 900 species. Habitats in Costa Rica include mountain

forests (the highest peaks are above 12,000 feet), rain forests, dry forests, mangrove swamps, tropical marshes, and coasts on both the Pacific and the Caribbean. The country's great species diversity is one benefit of this great habitat diversity.

It is also a peaceful country with a social democratic system that provides reliable public education, public health, and reliable utilities to all of its citizens. The country's tourism infrastructure is excellent. Our group will stay in comfortable lodges surrounded by excellent natural habitat. All rooms have private hot water bathrooms. Food and water are reliably safe in all tourist areas, and almost all meals are provided throughout the trip. Our group will travel together in a private mini-bus driven by a professional driver, who is likely to also be a good spotter of birds and other wildlife.

Our goal is to visit different habitats and to learn about tropical ecology while searching for birds and other wildlife. Activities will usually begin at or before dawn. Many days our early start will be optional, though you might not want to miss the vibrancy of a tropical morning. Days will be filled with active nature explorations, but there will often be opportunities to skip some activities to relax around the lodges and/or explore on your own—and we hope you’ll take the opportunity to do some of that.

*The following day-to-day itinerary represents an outline of our plans. Details and specifics may be changed at the leaders’ discretion for any reason that they determine to be in the best interests of the group. (B, L, and/or D after the date denotes meals included in the trip fee.)*



### **Friday, January 31**

Our journey begins with the arrival of flights into Costa Rica’s international airport, located on the outskirts of San José, Costa Rica’s capital. After passing through customs, you will be met by a Costa Rica Expeditions transfer guide, who will take you to the Hotel Bougainvillea, a garden hotel outside of town in the San Jose suburb of Heredia. Those arriving on early flights can enjoy a stroll through the gardens, where one can find butterflies, tropical plants (many labeled) and a number of interesting birds, including Blue-gray Tanager, Baltimore Oriole, Blue-crowned

Motmot, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, and Tropical Kingbird. *(Overnight at Hotel Bougainvillea)*

*The capital city of San José is perched more than 3,000 feet above sea level in a mountain-rimmed area called the Central Valley or, more accurately, the central plateau. Three other major cities are nearby, making this easily the country’s most densely populated area. The elevation results in a very comfortable climate. Scenery throughout the central plateau is impressive, as the high peaks of the central volcanic mountain range fill the northern and eastern horizons. The city has a number of nice museums and urban attractions, but it is a busy and crowded city. Our trip includes a short visit to one of the downtown museums. If you would like to spend more time visiting the city, we recommend extending your stay by a day or two at either end of the trip.*

### **Saturday, February 1 (B, D)**

We begin the trip with a leisurely day in the central plateau. An optional early-morning bird walk on the grounds will be followed by another optional activity: a visit to either the Costa Rican National Museum of Natural History or the country’s Gold Museum, both of which are located in downtown San Jose. A late lunch will be on your own dime back at the Hotel Bougainvillea. You may, however, pass on the morning’s museum outing and stay back at the Hotel Bougainvillea to rest and relax in the tropical warmth. Late in the day, we’ll meet our Costa Rican guide, Eddie Recio, for an orientation to the trip and a welcome dinner. *(Overnight at the Hotel Bougainvillea)*

### **Sunday, February 2 (B, L, D)**

This morning we leave the Central Valley and head east, up and over the Continental Divide to our first destination at around 3,000 feet in elevation on the Caribbean slope of the Talamanca Mountains. It rains frequently on the eastern slope of the mountains, and here we'll get our first looks at tropical birds, butterflies and other wildlife amidst the lush forests of this region. We'll arrive at our home for two nights, Rancho Naturalista, in time for lunch. After settling into our rooms, we'll explore the grounds of our lovely lodge, located on 125 acres of untouched and protected rainforest, semi-wooded pasture, and stream valley. (*Overnight at Rancho Naturalista*)

### **Monday, February 3 (B, L, D)**

More than 400 species of birds have been recorded in the diverse habitats around our lodge and we'll spend the day enjoying various trails looking for a variety of them. Rancho's main building provides a great perch for balcony birding, from which one can observe and photograph many species of hummingbirds attracted to feeders. Possible species include: White-necked Jacobin, Green Thorntail, the Violet-headed Hummingbird and Rancho's signature species, the Snowcap Hummingbird. The lodge's environs are also rich in plant life and other animal life, including butterflies and moths. (*Overnight at Rancho Naturalista*)



### **Tuesday, February 4, through Thursday, February 6 (B, L, D)**

We pack up after breakfast and head downhill and westward back toward the Central Valley. There, we'll turn to the north and head up and over the Continental Divide yet again before reaching our second destination in the Caribbean lowlands at just several hundred feet above sea level. Our lodge for the next three nights is La Quinta de Sarapiquí, a lovely little lodge in one the country's most wildlife-rich regions. Much of our time here will be spent exploring the La Selva Biological Field Station, site of hundreds of pioneering studies of the American tropical rainforest. Plant diversity here is mind-boggling, birding is great, and other wildlife is abundant. Likely finds include epiphytic orchids, monkeys, bats, green iguanas, poison arrow frogs, agouti, blue morpho butterflies, toucans, a good assortment of antbirds, and tanagers, flycatchers, including Long-tailed Tyrant, trogons, and many other bird species. The climate is hot here in this lowland rain forest, so we'll want to be out at dawn and take a siesta after lunch. We may have the chance for a night walk at La Selva. (*Overnights at La Quinta*)

### **Friday, February 7 through Saturday, February 8 (B, L, D)**

After breakfast, we head west and upward toward the crest of the mountains, stopping shy of the summit at a lovely, isolated lodge called Bosque de Paz, meaning "Forest of Peace." We'll nearly fill this small, 12-room lodge, which is surrounded by mountain forest and sits adjacent to two National Parks. The elevation here is about 5000 feet, so temperatures are cool. The flora and fauna are exceptionally rich. There are lovely gardens at the lodge, including one featuring orchids, and bird feeders are all around, luring hummingbirds and seed eaters. We could see six

or more species of hummer here, including Purple-throated Mountain-Gem, Violet Sabrewing, Volcano Hummingbird, and Green-crowned Brilliant. Little Torrent Tyrannulets flit over the creek, and big Black Guans barge onto the bird feeders, dwarfing the songbirds. The forest trails are home to many, many birds. There's a slight chance to see Resplendent Quetzal here, called by some the most beautiful bird in the world. Other rare, secretive birds flourish in the forests of Bosque de Paz, including Silvery-fronted Tapaculo, Peg-billed Finch, Streak-breasted Treehunter, and Black-banded Woodcreeper. We can hope to see several forest-dwelling mammals here, including coati, paca, and agouti. (*Overnights at Bosque de Paz.*)



### **Sunday, February 9 (B, L, D)**

Today we say goodbye to our Bosque de Paz hosts and begin a drive north towards Nicaragua, crossing the fertile agricultural San Carlos Plains. A few miles from the border, we turn west from the main road and head to the village of Caño Negro. This last bit of the drive crosses seasonally-flooded fields that can be loaded with herons, egrets, jacanas, and other birds. We will arrive at the Natural Lodge Caño Negro in time for a late lunch. This more western-styled lodge sits at the edge of the village, just a short distance from the Caño Negro National

Wildlife Refuge. The climate is hot, but the rooms are comfortable and air-conditioned. The Caño Negro Refuge features a seasonally-flooded lake and many interconnected waterways along the Rio Frio. It's the second largest freshwater wetland in the country. At this time of year—the dry season—it will be smaller and shallower. After lunch and some downtime—during which folks can rest and/or swim in the lodge's pool—you can join the leaders for a stroll around the town and down a few of its dead-end streets where there are places to see birds and experience the quiet pace of a remote Costa Rican village. (*Overnight at the Lodge Caño Negro.*)

### **Monday, February 10 (B, L, D)**

This morning we're out very early for the first of our boat rides through the refuge on this day. (For one boat trip, we'll head upriver into vast, shallow marshes; our other trip will us down into deeply forested waterways.) If water levels permit, we'll also venture into the lake itself. There's a great variety of wildlife to be seen from the boat, including green iguana, white-faced capuchin monkey, spectacled caiman, and a great variety of birds. Three species that are rare in Costa Rica occur here: Black-collared Hawk, Nicaraguan Grackle, and Jabiru. With luck we'll spot one or two of these, but we're sure to see many other species. Possibilities include Green Ibis, Gray-necked Wood-Rail, Boat-billed Heron, and American Pygmy-Kingfisher. Late this afternoon—after lunch and a bit of siesta time—we'll take our second boat ride through the Refuge with a return to our lodge as the sun sets. (*Overnight at the Lodge Caño Negro.*)

### **Tuesday, February 11 (B, L, D)**

We leave the hot and humid richness of the Cano Negro wetlands this morning. After packing up, we'll head back to the Central Valley today. We'll likely make a stop or two along the way—or we might decide to make a later morning departure, depending on the weather and other factors. We'll return to the main highway and enjoy the scenery on our ride back to the main population center in the country. We'll spend the overnight back at our first destination—the

Hotel Bougainvillea—where we'll enjoy a festive end-of-the-trip farewell dinner. (*Overnight at Hotel Bougainvillea*)

**Wednesday, February 12 (B)**

Our tropical adventure concludes with transfers to the airport for flights home. You may need to leave the hotel as much as 4 hours prior to your departure time, so consider that when making your reservations. **DO NOT make any flight reservations until/unless you receive a Trip Is On letter from us.** If you have a mid-day flight or afternoon flight, you will be able to spend the morning on the Hotel Bougainvillea's grounds.

**Leadership team:**



Our former Senior Naturalist **Stephanie Mason** is always excited to return to the tropical wonderland of Costa Rica where she has led trips for us for well over 20 years. Before her recent retirement from Nature Forward, she led many adult classes and field trips—both in the DMV region and farther afield (including Nova Scotia, Yellowstone, Galapagos Islands, Ecuador, and South Florida). She retreats to Colorado's Rocky Mountain National Park—each summer since 1998—to do long-term butterfly survey work as a volunteer naturalist/scientist.



**Eddie Recio** has been a naturalist guide for 25 years and says he still loves guiding. Why? *“It's the opportunity to be in contact with Costa Rica's visitors, an excuse to be constantly in contact with the tropical forest and the outdoors, and the challenge of having to continually learn new things and stay abreast of what's happening in the world!”*