



Costa Rica

A Trove of Tropical Birds—and More

March 5-17, 2026

Leaders: Stephanie Mason & Eddie Recio

For well over 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 where plant diversity is mind-boggling.



Our itinerary visits a variety of habitats where lessons about tropical ecology will surround us and tropical birds and other wildlife will dazzle us. The Caribbean lowlands of our first stop are classic tropical rainforest: a lush, luxuriant environment brimming with diversity. We'll visit and explore three more areas on our trip: La Cusinga, near Marino Ballena National Park on the southern Pacific Coast; Talari Lodge at just over 2000 feet in the Valle de El General Valley; and Wilson Botanical Gardens/Las Cruces Biological Station situated at around 3,000 feet near the

border with Panama.

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 more than 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

most tourist areas, and almost all meals are provided in this trip's fee. Our group will travel together in a private mini-bus driven by a professional driver.

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. On 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.)



Thursday, March 5

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 and exiting from the airport building, 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, Lessin's 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.

Friday, March 6 (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 the National Museum of Costa Rica 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*)

Saturday, March 7 through Monday, March 9 (B, L, D)

This morning we leave the Central Valley and head east, up and over the Continental Divide to our first 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 group of cabins 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 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. We may also visit another site or two during our stay here in the lowlands. (*Overnights at La Quinta*)

Tuesday, March 10 (B, L, D) and Wednesday, March 11 (B, L, D)

After breakfast, we'll leave the Caribbean lowlands and head back up and over the Continental Divide driving southward to our next destination in the southern Pacific lowlands. (*It will be a long travel day, but there will be plenty of tropical scenery to enjoy along the way.*) Here we'll enjoy vibrant rain forest habitat with a two-night stay at the small and lovely La Cusinga lodge, which is tucked right into the pristine coastal rain forest of Marino Ballena National Park. We will explore the grounds of the lodge and possibly another nearby area. On some trips here, we've been lucky enough to spot whales from the lodge's high perch above the coastline. We'll work some downtime into the schedule so that you can enjoy the ocean views from the lodge. Depending on the timing of the tides and other factors, there *may* be time for a fairly-steep hike down to the Pacific Ocean beach. (*Swimming will NOT be allowed here as the undertow/currents are very strong and potentially dangerous.*) (*Overnights at La Cusinga*)



Thursday, March 12 (B, L, D) and Friday, March 13 (B, L, D)

We'll say goodbye to the coast and head north to connect with the Pan American Highway on our way to the Valle de El General, where our destination is Talari Mountain Lodge. Talari is located adjacent to the Chirripo River, whose clear waters flow down from some of Costa Rica's highest mountains. We'll spend some time visiting two local bird reserves during our time here, including Los Cusingos, established by the renowned author and naturalist/conservationist Alexander Skutch. You can also choose to skip one or both of these visits and enjoy birding solo on the lodge's grounds—or take a dip in the small pool on the grounds. Rooms are very basic here, but Talari's restaurant features excellent food and wonderful views from the dining room of colorful birds at busy fruit feeders. (*Overnights Talari Lodge*)

Saturday, March 14 (B, L, D)

After breakfast, we'll pack up and drive back to the Pan American Highway heading east and south before winding up in the hills of southern Costa Rica outside the town of San Vito, close to the border with Panama. Our destination is the Las Cruces Field Station of the Organization for Tropical Studies, located amidst the luxuriant plantings of the Wilson Botanical Gardens. Here our rooms will offer splendid views into the treetops and out over the valley. (*Overnight at Las Cruces*)

Sunday, March 15 (B, L, D)

We enjoy the full day here exploring Las Cruces. The Botanical Garden is full of a variety of tropical plants (many labelled!) and there are also large stands of natural forest which are part of the field station. Elevation here is around 3,000 feet, high enough for the climate to be comfortable, but low enough to support a rich assortment of birds and other wildlife, including butterflies, reptiles, and amphibians. (*Overnight at Las Cruces*)

Monday, March 16 (B, L, D)

We will leave the coffee-growing hills near San Vito this morning. After packing up, we'll head to the Pan American Highway and drive up and over the mountains (up to 11,000 feet) to return to the Central Valley. This will be another long (but scenery-rich!) travel day as we make our way back to the main population center of the country. We'll spend the overnight at the Hotel Trapp, where we'll enjoy a festive end-of-the-trip farewell dinner. (*Overnight at Hotel Trapp, which is located near the airport.*)

Tuesday, March 17 (B)

Our tropical adventure concludes with transfers to the airport for flights home. You may need to leave the hotel as much as 3.5 hours prior to your departure time, so consider that when making your reservations. NOTE: **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 Trapp'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. Stephanie

enjoyed working with Eddie on two trips in 2025 and she looks forward to co-leading with him again in 2026.



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!”*