TOUR CODE

03C

ADVENTURESABROAD

COSTA RICA FAMILY TOUR

Volcanoes, Cloud Forest & Beaches

13 days

Updated 29/04/2013

Day 1 *Arrival in San Jose*

Today we arrive in San Jose, Costa Rica.

Overnight in San Jose. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *San Jose: INBio Parque*

We have a morning departure to INBio Parque, an educational and recreational centre where visitors are exposed to samples of the vast world of biological diversity that can be found in Costa Rica. We visit the biodiversity centre, and the projection room in the company of an expert guide. We then walk one of the three interpretive trails, an excellent introduction to the country's natural marvels.

Overnight San Jose. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *San Jose - Arenal*

Today we stop at Sarchi, a village renowned for its colourful oxcarts and wooden handicrafts. We travel through rolling hills covered with sugar cane fields to overnight near Arenal Volcano. The volcano's regular eruptions and lava flow can be heard and seen in the night sky from afar on a clear night. We make a stop at the Baldi Hotsprings (located near Arenal and outside the Risk Zones established by the National Prevention of Risks and Emergency Commission). Here a geothermally-heated river flows through beautifully landscaped grounds featuring many plant and tree species and great birdlife. We will have time to relax in or around the various pools (bring a towel). The springs feature ten hot pools with different temperatures fed by individual springs and two swim-up bars.

This evening we make an excursion to see Arenal's perfect conical shape with glowing red lava flowing down its slopes (weather permitting).

Overnight in Arenal / La Fortuna area. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Arenal: Horseback Excursion*

This morning we embark on a 2-hour easy horseback ride through the forests and hills near Arenal Volcano. Your leader will provide expert guidance with plenty of information on the plants and animals that live in the trees and underbrush. Bring your binoculars as birdwatching can be particularly interesting.

This afternoon you may elect to follow your Tour Leader on a lava walk, a hike in the rain forest, or a visit to Arenal Waterfalls.

Overnight in Arenal / La Fortuna Area. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Arenal - Monteverde Cloud Forest*

Today we travel through a rustic rural countryside to the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve area (+/- 4 hours).

Covered in a mantle of moss, ferns and orchids, this private reserve is home to over 400 species of birds and a great number of animals. The forest is created by the winds, particular temperature and moisture conditions, and mountainous topography which combine during the dry season to hold a steady cloud cover along the continental divide. The rains and the moisture in the air nourish trees and plants rooted in the ground, as well as many plants that live at the upper levels of the forest, and take their nutrients directly from the mist and dust that pass through the air. The result is an enchanted fairy-tale environment where trees are laden with orchids, bromeliads, mosses and ferns that obscure their branches, where the moisture and mild temperatures and sunlight filtered by the forest canopy encourage the exuberance of begonias, heliconias, philodendron and many other tropical plants in every available space on the ground.

This afternoon we have a guided tour of the "Butterfly Garden" where butterflies and other endemic insects are raised and protected in a controlled environment allowing scientists to study them -- their place in the food chain and their response to things like increased pollution and climate change.

Overnight at Monteverde. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Monteverde Cloud Forest*

We have a full morning exploring the cloud forest reserve with the help of a local naturalist guide. There is more to the forest than the trees and lesser plants. Of over 320 bird species, the most notable is the quetzal with its long arc of tail feathers. Assorted trogons in addition to the quetzal inhabit the reserve, along with more than 50 varieties of hummingbird. About 500 kinds of butterfly are found at Monteverde. Among the more than 100 mammalian species are howler, white-faced and spider monkeys, coatis and their cousins, raccoons; as well as the rarely observed pumas, ocelots, jaguars, tapirs, and kinkajous.

This afternoon you may choose to go on an optional "Canopy Walk" excursion, located within the cloud forest. Suspension foot-bridges are strung across deep gorges allowing one to get a bird's eye view of the forest from a totally different perspective than we experienced this morning. At a leisurely pace, one can complete this easy and fascinating walk in about 90 minutes. Your Tour Leader can help you plan this activity (optional cost approx $25-40, subject to change).

REMEMBER: This can be a wet and windy place by definition. You should be prepared for varied conditions.

Overnight at Monteverde. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Monteverde - Quepos*

Today we travel to Quepos, the gateway to Manuel Antonio National Park, an unspoiled haven of natural beauty on the shores of the Pacific.

Overnight in Quepos area. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Manuel Antonio National Park*

This morning we enjoy a leisurely walk through part of Manuel Antonio Park. While strolling the forest trails and the white sand beaches, we'll encounter monkeys, iguanas, sea creatures and bird life of infinite variety. After our morning walk we will have time to relax on one of the park's beautiful beaches before returning to our hotel around lunch time. If you like you can stay and enjoy the park and return to the hotel on your own (via taxi).

Manuel Antonio National Park is an area of sand curving around a bay strewn with islands of rock, and shaded by green bordering forests. All are backdropped by dramatic cliffs. Manuel Antonio beach is one of the few places in Costa Rica where unspoiled primary forest grows right to the high-tide mark, allowing visitors to bathe at times in the shade.

South Espadilla is the northernmost of the park's beaches, followed by calmer Manuel Antonio beach, offshore of which are some coral spots. Third Beach has tidal pools where brightly coloured fish and eels are temporarily stranded. Last is Puerto Escondido, access to which is made difficult by the bordering rocky promontory.

Overnight in Quepos. Hotel California or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Quepos - San Jose*

Today we travel back to San Jose after a leisurely morning. Upon arrival in San Jose we'll visit the famous Gold Museum.

Overnight in San Jose. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *San Jose - Tortuguero*

This morning we travel by bus from San Jose through Braulio Carillo National Park, one of Costa Rica's largest. Later we visit a working banana plantation and pass through a region known for its cocoa production. We then board our riverboat and spend the afternoon journeying through myriad interconnecting rivers and canals that take us finally to the Caribbean coast and Tortuguero Park.

The park is a water thoroughfare which is a 160 km (100 mile) stretch of natural rivers, lagoons and estuaries, and connecting man-made waterways that run almost to the Nicaraguan border. The canal is the main "highway" of the northern coastal region, complete with directional signs and branches from the main trunk route.

As we go along the canal, keep a keen lookout for views of pastel-coloured toucans and monkeys of various type; if we're lucky, a lazy sloth hanging from a branch, and maybe a coati or two roaming the forest. Stands of mangroves and water hyacinth appear here and there. Scattered along the way are people, too -- fishers and farmers whose dugouts serve all the purposes of pickup trucks elsewhere. Mostly the banks remain wild, and the calls of monkeys and whistles of birds predominate over the noises of humans.

Overnight in Tortuguero. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 11 *Tortuguero*

Tortuguero Park is a fascinating place to explore. A jungle walk offers an opportunity to observe an awakening coastal rain forest full of lush vegetation and unique bird life. Keep your eyes open for the tiny red arrow frog-unique to this

region. After lunch we visit the village of Tortuguero accessible only by river boat; you may choose to walk on the Caribbean beach where several turtle species lay their eggs each year. We will visit the Tortuguero Museum, with its excellent displays pertaining to the ecology of the area and an informative video presentation specific to turtle conservation in Tortuguero and the entire Caribbean region. Before returning to our lodge, we have time to challenge some of the local kids to a lively game of soccer, a favourite local pastime.

Overnight in Tortuguero. Laguna Lodge or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 12 *Tortuguero - San Jose*

This morning we travel by boat and bus from the northeastern coast back to the central highlands arriving mid-afternoon with lunch en route.

Overnight San Jose. Hotel Balmoral or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 13 *Departure*

Departure from San Jose.

BUEN VIAJE! Meal plan: Breakfast.