

COSTA RICA FAMILY TOUR

Volcanoes & Cloud Forest

10 days

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Day 1 Arrival in San Jose

Today we arrive in San Jose, Costa Rica.

San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica, is on a plateau in the Central Valley at 1200 m (3,700 ft), ringed by lush green mountains and valleys. The population of this city is probably half of the whole country! The main downtown area is a bustling collection of well-laid-out streets filled with bustling traffic and lined with eclectic, historic architecture. On the surface, it is a gritty downtown area, but you'll also find friendly people, quirky spots, and the historic side of San Jose which might just change your initial impression.

Overnight in San Jose.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): 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.

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.

Overnight in Arenal / La Fortuna area.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): 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 in Monteverde.

Included Meal(s): 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 (your Tour Leader will advise re the current price while on tour).

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

Overnight at Monteverde.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Manuel Antonio National Park

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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.

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.

Some of the most frequently observed animals at Manuel Antonio are marmoset--the smallest of Costa Rican monkeys--white-faced and howler monkeys, racoons, pacas, opossums, and two- and three-toed sloths. Easily sighted seabirds include frigate birds, pelicans, terns, and brown boobies. A network of trails winds along the sea and through the forest.

Overnight in Quepos area.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Arenal - Tortuguero

This morning we travel by road from Arenal to Tortuguero, along the San Carlos flatlands featuring pasture lands and pineapple plantations and other local crops.

We then board our riverboat and spend the afternoon journeying through 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 human-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. Scattered along the way are human settlements, but mostly the banks remain wild, and the calls of monkeys and whistles of birds predominate over the noises of humans.

Overnight in Tortuguero.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Departure

Departure from Managua.

BUEN VIAJE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast