

Costa Rica: The Jewel of Central America

Saturday March 19 to Saturday April 2, 2011

Price \$3900

Two week tour that visits famous Cerro de la Muerte, Esquinas Lodge at the base of the Osa Peninsula, Carara National Park, the new and exciting Celeste Mountain Lodge, Arenal Volcano, and the La Selva Biological Station area in the Caribbean lowlands. About 500 species expected on this tour. Sensational birds such as Resplendent Quetzal and Three-wattled Bellbird. Wonderful hummingbird watching with as many as 40 species possible, including a visit to La Paz Waterfall Gardens. A visit to the Hanging Bridges at Arenal. Full days at La Selva and Braulio Carrillo National Park. Comfortable accommodations. Safe friendly country. Easy to get to. Great introduction to Neotropical birding.

There are few countries in Central and South America that are as easy to get to, and as safe to travel in as Costa Rica. Less than three hours from Miami, Costa Rica offers the birder a combination of fantastic birdwatching and introduction to the joys of Neotropical birds, while at the same time staying at very comfortable lodges and hotels in what is accepted as the most democratic country in the region. The scenery is stunning, and the birding even better! This comprehensive tour covers most of the country and stays at some of the most-exciting lodges in Costa Rica. The tour is designed to bird on both the Pacific and Caribbean slopes, visiting excellent national parks and private reserves. The birding in Costa Rica is amazing, with lots of hummingbird feeders to visit, and rich tropical rainforest with loads of toucans, parrots, and tanagers! Our accommodations and food will be excellent throughout, and Costa Rica is so clean, one can drink the water everywhere! The tour is designed to see more than 500 species.

We'll begin the tour with a visit to lovely Tapanti National Park and continue up the Pan American Highway to Cerro de la Muerte and the San Gerardo de Dota area. Here we will stay in a beautiful mountain lodge with Resplendent Quetzals often breeding right on the property. Two nights here will insure multiple opportunities of seeing this unbelievable member of the Trogon family! The birding around the lodge will also be excellent, and we will surely see most of the regional endemics found in the mountains of Costa Rica and Panama, including a nice selection of hummingbirds coming to the feeders.

We'll then travel to the Pacific lowlands for a two night stay at very comfortable Esquinas Lodge, located near Golfito at the base of the Osa Peninsula. The birding here is wonderful, and we hope to see the Costa Rican endemic, the Black-cheeked Ant-Tanager. The forest trails near the lodge, as well as the road, provide an excellent opportunity to see many of the "Southwest" Costa Rican specialties. After two nights at Esquinas, we'll travel up the coast to near Carara National Park. This wonderful reserve is well-situated in the transition zone between the lush, wetter environments of southwest Costa Rica, and the very dry desert environments to the northwest. The result is an incredibly bird-rich

environment, with more than 300 species possible within a very short distance. The forest trails at Carara are flat and easy to walk, and the birding there is some of the best tropical birding we have encountered – including Scarlet Macaws, five species of trogons, six species of wrens, two motmots, puffbirds, jacamars, great hummingbirds, and an amazing number of flycatchers. Our hotel has great birding right on the grounds.

The tour will next cross over to the Caribbean side of the country and the new Celeste Mountain Lodge. Our route will take us by way of the Guanacaste lowlands in the northwest portion of the country. This will be our chance to see a number of dry-country specialty birds that range from Mexico south to northern Panama. Celeste Mountain Lodge is a new lodge located on the slopes of Volcan Tenorio National Park, an area seldom visited by birding tours. Here we hope to see some incredible specialties such as both Today and Keel-billed Motmots, and a number of foothill specialties. At Arenal Volcano, we of course hope to see the volcano itself (a sight to behold), but the birding is excellent there, particularly at the Hanging Bridges, which offers stunning scenery as well! It will then be on to the lowlands, where we'll spend an entire day at La Selva Biological Station, where the birding can be fantastic, another full day in Braulio Carrillo National Park looking for a variety of foothill specialties (including several mind-blowing tanagers), and will finish at the La Paz Waterfall Gardens, where more hummingbird feeders attract a very nice variety!

Day by Day Itinerary

Day 1: The tour begins this evening at 7:00 pm with an introductory meeting, followed by dinner. **Night in San Jose.**

Hotel Bougainvillea

Day 2: We'll depart San Jose early this morning with our first destination Tapanti National Park. En route we will make a stop in Cartago where we'll search for a few open-country specialties, including White-throated Flycatcher and the Costa Rican subspecies of Sedge Wren. Tapanti is a beautiful protected watershed with lush middle-elevation cloud-forest draping the hillsides. We'll stroll along a wide road that traverses the forest, and we'll search for a number of Caribbean slope species including Black Guan, Crimson-fronted Parakeet, White-bellied Mountain-Gem, Black-bellied Hummingbird, Collared Trogon, Prong-billed and Red-headed Barbets, Silvery-fronted Tapaculo, Golden-bellied Flycatcher, Brown-capped Vireo, Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush, Slate-throated Redstart, Spangle-cheeked and Silver-throated Tanagers, and Sooty-faced Finch. After lunch we'll work our way up Cerro de la Muerte and the Talamanca Highlands to our lovely lodge for the next two nights. Before reaching our lodging we'll bird along the road at about 9000 feet elevation, and have our first chance at a number of the regional endemics found in these mountains, including fancy species such as Volcano Hummingbird, Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, Sooty Robin, Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Collared Redstart, and both Yellow-thighed and Large-footed Finch. We'll arrive at our lodge before dark. **Night in San Gerardo de Dota.**

Hotel: Savegre Lodge

Day 3: We'll have the entire day to leisurely bird the San Gerardo Valley, which is one of the best places in the country to see the magnificent Resplendent Quetzal. There is usually a pair nesting right on the grounds of our lodge, or we may find a fruiting avocado tree, which often attracts several males. While seeing a quetzal will be our main goal, the valley is also an excellent place for all the specialty birds of the region. Other regional endemics we are likely to see include White-throated Mountain-Gem, Scintillant Hummingbird, Green Violetear, Acorn Woodpecker, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Ruddy Treerunner, Buffy Tuftedcheek, Streak-breasted Treehunter, Tufted Flycatcher, Black-capped Flycatcher, Ochraceous Pewee, Barred Becard, Yellow-winged Vireo, Ochraceous Wren, Black-billed and Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrushes, Mountain and Sooty Robins, Black-cheeked Warbler, Wrenthrush, Flame-colored Tanager, Peg-billed Finch, Slaty Flower-piercer, , Black-thighed Grosbeak, and Yellow-bellied Siskin. In the afternoon we'll go up higher to the top of Cerro de la Muerte, and in the stunted *bamboo* we will search for both Timberline Wren and Volcano Junco. At dusk on the way back to the lodge we'll stop and look for Dusky Nightjar, which is also endemic to these mountains. **Night at San Gerardo de Dota.**

Hotel: Savegre Lodge

Day 4: We'll have this morning to make sure we have seen Resplendent Quetzal. Today is a travel day as we move from Cerro de la Muerte to Esquinas Lodge near Golfito on the Pacific coast. Near the high pass we'll make a stop at a small restaurant that has hummingbird feeders, and is good for Fiery-throated Hummingbird. We'll then work our way down to the Valle de General and the town of San Isidro. The roadside birding outside this town is excellent, and we'll specifically look for a few specialties of this region of the country, including Scaled Pigeon, Smooth-billed Ani, Fiery-billed Aracari, Pale-breasted Spinetail, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, Lesser Elaenia, and Streaked Saltator. We have seen Pearl Kite nesting here, which is a recent invader from the south, as well as the occasional Turquoise Cotinga. In the late morning we'll head for the southern coast near Golfito. Our destination is very comfortable Esquinas Lodge, located within the edge of beautiful rainforest. The road into the lodge is very interesting, and passes through open country where we have seen a number of species rare in Costa Rica, including Brown-throated Parakeet, Ruddy-breasted Seedeater, and Red-breasted Blackbird. The beautiful lodge is owned and operated by the local community. **Night at Esquinas Lodge.**

Night at Esquinas Lodge

Day 5: Our goal at Esquinas Lodge is to see many of the Southwest Costa Rican specialties, and we'll have the entire day to bird the trail system behind the lodge, as well as the very productive road to Golfito that passes through excellent forest. Some of the many birds we'll search for include Baird's Trogon, Chestnut-mandibled Toucan, Fiery-billed Aracari, Golden-naped, and Pale-billed Woodpeckers, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Black-hooded Antshrikes, Orange-collared and Red-capped Manakins, Golden-crowned

Spadebill, Riverside and Scaly-breasted Wrens, and many others! One of the more important species to find is the Black-cheeked Ant-Tanager, a bird endemic to the Osa Peninsula in southwestern Costa Rica – and regular on the trails behind the lodge! **Night at Esquinas Lodge.**

Night at Esquinas Lodge

Days 6-7: After a final morning of birding around Esquinas Lodge, we'll head north along the coastal road that will take us to Carara. As this is a travel day, we'll have to keep moving so that we reach our hotel at a reasonable time, but we will make a number of roadside stops for raptors, such as Yellow-headed Caracara and Gray Hawk, and at any wet area we may see, always good for Northern Jacanas or Purple Gallinules. The journey will be great for open-country birds, such as anis and seedeaters, and as we get closer to Jaco and Carara, we may start to see our first Scarlet Macaws. We will arrive at our very comfortable hotel in the afternoon, our base for the next four nights. We'll have most of two days to explore the numerous birding areas around Carara. The national park is famous for its population of Scarlet Macaws, and we are certain to see many, particularly at dusk one evening as we will traditionally watch them departing Carara for their nighttime roost in the mangroves along the coast – an amazing sight! The national park is also famous for its excellent birding. Carara is located at the north end of a set of wetter hills extending north from southwest Costa Rica, and has a distinctly wet forest component to its avifauna. But, at the same time, these hills end at the Rio Tarcoles (along the north boundary of the park), and the habitat becomes incredibly drier just north of the park. The result is that Carara is a transition between these two habitat types, and the incredibly high species diversity here is a direct result of this habitat diversity.

Our birding in the park will be excellent. There are two main trails that we will bird, one that passes through more secondary forest, but is unbelievably birdy, and one that does a nice loop through primary forest. The species list for this area exceeds 300 species, and just a sampling of the many birds we are likely to see here include, Boat-billed Heron, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, King Vulture, Collared Forest-Falcon, Double-toothed Kite, Scarlet Macaw, Mealy and Yellow-naped Parrots, Orange-fronted Parakeet, Orange-chinned Parakeet, Band-tailed Barbthroat, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, Blue-throated Goldentail, Purple-crowned Fairy, Slaty-tailed, Black-headed, Black-throated, and Violaceous Trogons, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Pygmy, Amazon, Green, and Ringed Kingfishers, White-whiskered Puffbird, White-necked Puffbird, Rufous-tailed Jacamar, Hoffman's, Great and Barred Antshrikes, Dusky Antbird, Dot-winged Antwren, Royal Flycatcher, Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Northern Bentbill, Blue-crowned, and Long-tailed Manakins, Green Shrike-vireo, Rufous-naped, Rufous-and-white, Black-bellied, and Rufous-breasted Wrens, Long-billed Gnatwren, White-shouldered and Bay-headed Tanagers, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Orange-billed Sparrow, and Blue-black Grosbeak.

The inside the forest trail will be a great area to find a nice mixed-species flock, which may a number of different "flock" birds including Tawny-winged, Buff-throated, Black-striped, and Long-tailed Woodcreepers, Slaty and White-flanked Antrens, Sulfur-rumped Flycatcher, and Tawny-crowned Greenlet, and on the forest floor we may run into Great

Tinamou, or Ruddy Quail-Dove. The forest is great for trogons, and we'll look specifically for a few more scarce species such as Crested Guan, Great Currawong, Rufous-winged Woodpecker, Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser, Spectacled Antpitta, Black-faced Anthrush, Stub-tailed Spadebill, Thrushlike Manakin (Schiffornis), and Spot-crowned Euphonia.

Another main area we will visit is the mouth of the Tarcoles River, where we can expect a large number of water birds, especially egrets and herons, as well as Brown Pelicans and Magnificent Frigate-birds. If the tide is right we may also see a wide variety of waders, gulls and terns. Our goal will be to find a selection of mangrove specialties, including Mangrove Hummingbird, Pygmy Kingfisher, Panama Flycatcher, Mangrove Vireo, Mangrove (Yellow) Warbler, and possibly Scrub Greenlet. The Rio Tarcoles is always fun, if for nothing other than seeing American Crocodiles up close and personal!

We'll do some night birding near Carara, where we may see Striped, Black-and-white and Spectacled Owls, as well as Pacific Screech-Owl. The grounds of the hotel are also a wonderful place to wander around (particularly for those not wanting a siesta or a dip in the pool), and we have seen numerous fun species nesting by the rooms, including Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, both Chestnut-mandibled Toucan and Fiery-billed Aracari, Streaked Flycatcher, Rose-throated Becard, lots of Kiskadees, Rufous-naped Wrens, and Yellow-green Vireo. **Nights at Carara.**

Nights at Hotel Villa Lapas

Day 8: We'll have the early morning to bird at Carara, searching for anything that we may be missing, or just repeating one of the incredible birding trails that we have already covered. Later in the morning we'll head north again, making a stop in the town of Orotina, where a pair of Black-and-white Owls lives in the central park! During the heat of the day, we'll travel to our next destination, Celeste Mountain Lodge. Our plan will be to bird our way there, mainly visiting dry country localities in the Guanacaste province. This region has an avifauna with a distinctly "Mexican" flavor, with numerous more northern Central American species reaching their southern limit in extreme northwest Panama. We'll bird a few areas of gallery forest along streams, as well as open country and pastureland with brushy thickets. The bird possibilities are many, including Crested Caracara, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Jabiru, Orange-fronted Parakeet, Yellow-naped Parrot, Common Ground-Dove, Lesser Ground-Cuckoo, Black-headed Trogon, the stunning Turquoise-browed Motmot, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Plain-capped Starthroat, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Hoffman's Woodpecker, Streak-headed Woodcreeper, Brown-crested and Nutting's Flycatchers, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Long-tailed Manakin, Yellow-green Vireo, Banded Wren, Tropical and White-lored Gnatcatcher, Rufous-capped Warbler, Olive Sparrow, Scrub Euphonia, and Streak-backed and Spot-breasted Orioles. We'll bird the lowlands until after lunch, and then work our way across the Continental Divide, eventually arriving at Celeste Mountain Lodge within Volcan Tenorio National Park. The lodge is relatively new, and the birding there very exciting. **Night at Celeste Mountain Lodge.**

Night at Celeste Mountain Lodge

Day 9: The Celeste Mountain Lodge is located within the national park in the Caribbean foothills. We'll have the entire day to explore the forest trails on the property, as well as other local areas. The possibilities around the lodge on the forest trails is impressive, not necessarily for the number of species, but for the quality. It is here we will search for two of the rarest birds in Central America – both the Tody and Keel-billed Motmots. Some of the many other species we will hope to encounter include Great Curassow, Lattice-tailed Trogon, Black-crested Coquette, Coppery-headed Emerald, Yellow-eared Toucanet, Dull-mantled and Spotted Antbirds, White-ruffed Manakin, and Rufous-winged Tanager. The lodge itself is uniquely constructed and eco-friendly. The area is incredibly beautiful, with wonderful waterfalls, and views of Volcan Tenorio. Relatively few birding groups have visited the lodge – so the possibility of new discoveries is great! **Night at Celeste Mountain Lodge.**

Night at Celeste Mountain Lodge.

Day 10: We'll have all morning to once again bird the grounds of the lodge and search for the rare motmots, as well as other species. In the late morning we'll depart Celeste Mountain Lodge and head the short distance to the Arenal Volcano area. If we are lucky, the volcano will be showing in all its glory, and possibly even erupting off and on! We'll have the afternoon and following morning to bird locally, this afternoon concentrating on some nice roadside birding where we may see Swallow-tailed Kite, White Hawk, Crested Guan, Pale-vented Pigeon, Red-lored and White-crowned Parrots, Squirrel Cuckoo, White-necked Jacobin, Blue-throated Goldentail, Violaceous Trogon, Broad-billed Motmot, White-fronted Nunbird (rare), Collared Aracari, Keel-billed Toucan, Black-cheeked and Lineated Woodpeckers, Great Antshrike, Bare-crowned Antbird, Thicket Antpitta, Black-headed Tody-Flycatcher, Long-tailed Tyrant, Cinnamon Becard, Masked Tityra, Black-throated, Stripe-breasted, and Bay Wrens, Clay-colored Robin, Buff-rumped Warbler, Passerini's Tanager, Olive-backed Euphonia, Buff-throated and Black-headed Saltators, and Montezuma Oropendola. Our comfortable lodging will have a view of the volcano. **Night near Arenal Volcano.**

Hotel: Arenal Manoa

Day 11: We'll have the entire morning to bird locally around Arenal. Our main birding site will be a wonderful private reserve known as The Hanging Bridges. A well-maintained, paved walkway passes through a lovely intact patch of foothill forest, and crosses numerous gullies and ravines by means of "hanging bridges." The walk is beautiful, with views of the volcano, and the birding can be excellent in the forest as well. In the past we have seen a number of great forest species, including White Hawk, Great Curassow, Brown-hooded Parrot, Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer, Purple-crowned Fairy, Lattice-tailed Trogon, White-whiskered Puffbird, Keel-billed Toucan, Rufous-winged Woodpecker, Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser, Brown-billed Scythebill, Russet Antshrike, White-flanked Antwren, Dull-mantled and Spotted Antbirds, Thicket Antpitta, Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher, Rufous Mourner, White-collared, White-ruffed, and Red-capped

Manakins, Green Shrike-Vireo, White-breasted Wood-Wren, Nightingale Wren, White-throated Shrike-Tanager, Shining Honeycreeper, and Scarlet-rumped Cacique, just to name a few. After lunch we will continue to the La Selva area where we will check into Selva Verde Lodge, our base of operations for the next three nights. In the late afternoon, we'll bird outside of La Selva Biological Station (where we will be spending the entire day tomorrow). The roadside birding here is excellent with lots of possibilities. A few of the more special birds we'll look for this afternoon include both Keel-billed and Chestnut-mandibled Toucans, Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Fasciated and Great Antshrikes, White-ringed Flycatcher, Bright-rumped Attila, Cinnamon Becard, Black-crowned Tityra, Snowy Cotinga, Band-backed Wren, Olive-crowned Yellowthroat, White-lined Tanager, Plain-colored Tanager, Olive-backed Euphonia, Shining Honeycreeper, Black-headed Saltator, and Yellow-tailed and Black-cowled Orioles. We'll return to our lodge for a nice relaxing dinner. **Night at Selva Verde Lodge.**

Hotel: Selva Verde Lodge

Day 12: Today we'll spend the entire day at La Selva Biological Station. The station, owned and operated by the Organization of Tropical Studies (OTS), is a haven for researchers interested in tropical ecology, but it is also a wonderful place to bird. We'll begin on the entrance road (where we birded last night) and look for all the species listed above. The real target bird this morning is Snowy Cotinga, and the dead emergent tops of many of the tall tree at the edge of La Selva has been a traditionally good place to see this stunning species. Another specialty is Yellow-tailed Oriole, a more widespread species, but exceedingly rare in Panama, and the entrance to La Selva is the best place to find it. After about an hour of excellent birding here, we'll enter the station, register, and with a local guide bird a few of the many trails available. La Selva is great for "big birds", and we have the chance of seeing species such as Great Curassow, Gray-headed Chachalaca, Semiplumbeous Hawk, Tiny Hawk, Short-billed Pigeon, Olive-backed Quail-Dove, Olive-throated and Orange-chinned Parakeet, White-crowned, Red-lored, and Mealy Parrots, Gray-rumped and Lesser Swallow-tailed Swifts, Long-tailed and Bronzy Hermits, Blue-chested Hummingbird, Slaty-tailed and Black-throated Trogons, Rufous and Broad-billed Motmots, White-necked and Pied Puffbirds, Collared Aracari, both big toucans, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Slaty Spinetail, Northern Barred Woodcreeper, Western Slaty-Antshrike, Yellow Tyrannulet, Ochre-bellied Flycatcher, Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant (the world's smallest passerine!), Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Red-capped Manakin, the "Canebrake" form of Plain Wren, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Golden-hooded Tanager, Blue-black Grosbeak, and Black-faced Grosbeak. We'll have lunch with the scientists at their cafeteria, and continue birding other trails in the afternoon. In the very late afternoon we'll finish the day back at Selva Verde Lodge checking the river for Sunbittern, Fasciated Tiger-Heron, and at dusk Short-tailed Nighthawk. **Night at Selva Verde Lodge.**

Hotel: Selva Verde Lodge

Day 13: Our destination this morning is Braulio Carrillo National Park, located on the Caribbean slope of the volcanoes that practically ring San Jose. The park is named after a past president of Panama, and was formed as a compromise when a major highway was proposed connecting San Jose at the Caribbean coast. Today the park remains wild and remote, but there is one main trail that we will have access to, and we'll spend the better part of the day covering it. What makes Braulio special is that the forest trail we will bird is located at about 2500 feet elevation, the perfect zone for many of the Caribbean foothill specialties. There are numerous species that we will search for that we have seen on this trail over the years, including Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Purplish-backed Quail-Dove, Lattice-tailed Trogon, Lanceolated Monklet, Red-headed Barbet, Yellow-eared Toucanet, Cinnamon Woodpecker, Brown-billed Scythebill, Streak-crowned Antwren, Checker-throated Antwren, Dull-mantled Antbird, Ocellated Antbird, Black-crowned Antpitta, Slaty-capped Flycatcher, Rufous-browed Tyrannulet, Gray-headed Piprites, White-ruffed and White-crowned Manakins, Green Shrike-Vireo, Stripe-breasted Wren, Tawny-faced Gnatwren, Black-headed Nightingale-Thrush, Pale-vented Robin, Ashy-throated Bush-Tanager, Black-and-yellow, Olive, White-throated Shrike-, White-shouldered, Emerald, Speckled, Bay-headed, and Rufous-winged Tanagers, Scarlet-thighed Tanager, and Slate-colored Grosbeak, just to name a few. At a nearby property with "hummingbird" bushes, we will have a chance for several fancy species of hummingbirds, such as the amazing Snowcap, as well as Black-crested Coquette, Violet-headed Hummingbird, and Crowned Woodnymph. In the late afternoon we'll return to Selva Verde Lodge and bird locally along the river. **Night at Selva Verde Lodge.**

Hotel: Selva Verde Lodge

Day 14: Our last day of birding will also be spent in the "foothills" on the way back to San Jose. The La Virgen del Socorro area is a lovely area of rugged hill forest along the slopes of the Sarapiquí River. We'll leisurely stroll down a dirt road that traverses through excellent remaining forest. Many of the species possible are the same as we have looked for in Braulio Carrillo National Park, and this area seems particularly good for tanagers, including Black-and-yellow, Speckled, Bay-headed, and White-winged. Red-headed Barbet is a possibility, and Immaculate Antbird can be found on the slopes. This also seems to be an excellent area to see the rare Rufous-browed Tyrannulet, which accompanies the mixed-species flocks. In the late morning we'll search the skies for flying raptors, this area particularly good for Barred Hawk and Swallow-tailed Kite. Later we'll stop at a small restaurant with more hummingbird feeders, which often have lots of Violet Saberwings, and at least a couple of Green Thorntails. We'll have lunch at the La Paz Waterfall Garden, a lovely set of gardens and trails along the many waterfalls. It also has more hummingbird feeders, and tanager feeders, and we'll have time to spend a couple of hours looking for specialties such as Black-bellied Hummingbird, and Sooty-faced Finch. In the late afternoon we'll return to our San Jose Hotel for a well-earned break, and a lovely farewell dinner. **Night in San Jose.**

Hotel Bougainvillea in San Jose

Day 15: The trip ends this morning in San Jose with a transfer to the airport.

Maximum size of group: The maximum group size for our Costa Rica tour is nine.

Tour Leader for your Costa Rica Tour: Gary Rosenberg

Gary Rosenberg lives in Tucson, where he has designed and led about 50 birding tours to Costa Rica during the past 25 years, and practically considers the country his home away from home. He has been birding since early childhood, studied Ornithology for a Master's degree at Louisiana State University, and is the author or co-author of numerous scientific and popular articles on bird identification and behavior. Gary is also a passionate photographer, and has had numerous bird photos published in magazines and books. He is currently the secretary of the Arizona Bird Committee, which evaluates rare bird reports within Arizona. His current areas of expertise, apart from Costa Rica, include most areas in North America, in particular Arizona, Florida, and Alaska, as well as Ecuador, Panama, and Peru.

Pace of the tour: The pace of this tour is Easy. Most of the birding will be done from along roads, and well-maintained forest trails. The trails are generally wide (like road-cuts), but a couple of trails are a bit narrower, and only a little hilly at times. The best birding in the Neotropics is done in the early mornings, so one should expect relatively early breakfasts (5:00 - 5:30). We would like to note here that Costa Rica is in the "eastern" edge of a time zone, and the sun is already up at 5:30 am! The good news is that it also gets dark earlier (around 5:30 pm), so we usually have relatively early evenings. We will try and schedule mid-day siestas during the hottest part of the day. On at least a few nights, there will be before-dinner owling excursions that may shorten our normal break between birding and dinner. The tour is designed to stay at comfortable lodges, with only one one-night stay, which minimizing the number of hotel changes.

Tour Price: \$3900. The cost of the tour includes all accommodations, food, within-tour transportation, baggage handling (when needed), entrance fees, water during the day's tour activities, and guide services, as indicated by the itinerary. In general the hotels and lodges we use on the tours are nice and comfortable, and often the best-available in the more remote areas we visit. In the cities we stay in above average (but not necessarily the most expensive) hotels. Meals are typically taken at the hotels and lodges.

The following items are not included in the tour price: travel to and from the location the tour begins and ends, laundry, alcoholic beverages, phone calls, and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: \$550

Deposit policy: At the time of booking a tour, a \$300 deposit is required to secure a space on the tour. This deposit is refundable or transferable up until 120 days prior to the departure date of the tour. The deposit must be received within 14 days of booking, or the reserved space will be released. Up to the 120 day prior to departure date, a deposit may be transferred to another Avian Journeys tour without penalty. Between 119 and 90 days

prior to tour departure, cancellation of a reservation will result in forfeit of 50% of the \$300 deposit. Cancellation of a reservation within 90 days of the tour departure date will result in forfeit of the deposit.

Tour Registration: To register for this Ecuador tour, please first contact Avian Journeys by email or phone to check on availability. Once we have confirmed that there is space on the tour, please fill out the registration form, which is available on the “Register for a tour” page, and mail it to Avian Journeys. It is very important that you read all the information in this document, and then make sure you sign and date the waiver at the end of the registration form. A \$300 deposit is necessary to secure a space on the trip. Full payment for the tour will be invoiced 100 days prior to the departure date, and must be received within 90 days of departure.

Cancellation policy: Cancellation by a tour participant greater than or equal to 90 days prior to the departure date will result in full refund of payments to Avian Journeys (minus 50% of the deposit if the cancellation occurs between 119 and 90 days prior to the tour departure). Cancellation by a tour participant within 90 days of a tour (but after invoicing and payment) will result in a refund of amounts we are able to recover from our hotels and ground agents. Fixed cost amounts can not be refunded. In general, the amount we can potentially refund may be as low as 50% or 25% of the cost of the tour.

Trip insurance. At the time of payment of your deposit for the tour, we highly recommend purchasing travel insurance. The following companies offer trip insurance, and/or emergency medical insurance: <http://www.travelinsured.com>, <http://www.accessamerica.com>, www.aaa.com. One never knows when personal illness, or an illness in the family is going to strike. Given that a cancellation by a participant within 90 days of departure might result in a loss of most, if not all of the cost of a tour, trip insurance is a good idea. Furthermore, insurance is recommended in case of an illness on a tour, and in a worse case scenario, the need for an emergency medical evacuation, which can be prohibitively expensive. Purchasing insurance is a personal choice, and Avian Journeys does not recommend one company over another.

Travel to Costa Rica

Once the tour is confirmed, you will need to purchase your airline ticket to San Jose, Costa Rica. Several major airlines, such as American, Continental, Delta, etc... and Iberia Airlines service San Jose. We strongly suggest planning your arrival in time for the Introductory Meeting on Day 1. If you are unable to arrive early on Day 1, please be aware that we often leave very early on Day 2, and there is the possibility that you will get very little sleep. If you decide to arrive a day early, we would be happy to arrange for an extra night's hotel in San Jose.

In this age of the Internet, booking a flight online is easy! Each individual airline has their own web site for booking flights, such as www.AA.com for American Airlines, and www.continentalairlines.com for Continental Airlines. Alternatively, one can visit sites such as www.orbitz.com or www.expedia.com which list multiple airline options.

IMPORTANT. You will need a valid passport to enter Costa Rica. The passport needs to be valid for at least six months beyond your date of entry. A visa is not needed to enter Costa Rica – you will need to fill out an entry form provided to you by the airlines and present this along with your passport to immigration. You will also be asked to fill out a customs declaration.

Entering Costa Rica

Entering Costa Rica is easy and should be stress free. When you deplane, follow the crowd to immigration. There may even be a person with a sign with your name on it as you deplane, and they may put a sticker on you saying “Unique Costa Rica” the name of our ground agent in San Jose. Hopefully your line at immigration will not be long, although there is a chance that multiple planes arrive simultaneously, and the immigration line can be slow. Patience is a virtue! The immigration process is quick and professional. You may be handed back a small portion of your entry form. Please keep this piece of paper in your passport and try not to lose it. Don’t worry though, if you do lose the paper, you will simple be asked to fill out a “new” one when you leave the country. Once through immigration you will arrive at the baggage claim area. Locate your carousel and retrieve your bags. You will next hand your customs declaration to a uniformed customs agent and likely be asked to pass your luggage through an x-ray machine. This is just a formality, and it is unlikely that they will ask you to open any bags.

Once through immigration and customs, you will pass through a door and be engulfed by a crowd of agents and loved ones meeting the flight. There will be a person with a sign with YOUR NAME on it, and/or AVIAN JOURNEYS. Our ground agent in Costa Rica is UNIQUE COSTA RICA. One, two, or all three of these should be on the sign. The person making the transfer usually speaks English and will help you with your luggage. They will transfer you to the hotel.

The language of Costa Rica is Spanish. While many “Ticos” speak some English, please be aware that English is a second language. Typically the persons making the transfer, and those at the reception at the hotel speak perfect English. Learning a few important words, such as the Spanish word for “beer” is recommended.

The currency of Costa Rica is the Colon. Currently (August 2009) there are about 587 colones to one U.S. Dollar. All hotels accept cash or the major credit cards. We do not recommend bringing Travelers Checks – these have become more difficult to cash in recent years. ATM machines are usually available in the major cities.

Be aware that San Jose is at nearly 4500 feet elevation, and if you are arriving in the evening, or if the weather is rainy, the temperature will be cool (not cold). A light jacket or sweater is advised.

Health Issues

We recommend checking with the CDC at www.cdc.com for recent warnings and recommendations for preventive medications and/or inoculations required (or suggested) for the areas you will be visiting in Costa Rica. It is unlikely that you will need any special inoculations, and we know of no Malaria in the country. But checking with the CDC to be sure is the safest course to take.

In general we believe you will probably be surprised by the lack of biting insects. While some areas might have some mosquitoes, and small biting flies (no-see-ums), they usually don't present much of a problem. Chiggers are also occasionally present. We do recommend a relatively strong insect repellent that contains "DEET".

Hotels and Food

Avian Journeys and Unique Costa Rica (our ground agent in Costa Rica) have many years experience organizing tours in Costa Rica. The hotels and lodges we have selected are both comfortable and well-situated for the birding. All hotels and lodges provide rooms with private bathrooms. Our hotel in San Jose can store extra baggage if needed. Most of the hotels and lodges provide laundry service.

The food in Costa Rica can be described as relatively standard international food (meat, chicken, fish) at the larger hotels, to nicely prepared local cuisine at some of the lodges (such as Esquinas Lodge). Most of the hotels and lodges we stay at cater to birders and provide early breakfasts for our groups, although some only provide "cold" breakfasts, which consist of cereal, breads with jam and butter, juice, coffee, and fresh fruit. Lunches are either taken at the hotel and lodges, or we have box lunches provided by them. All dinners will be at the hotels and lodges. A non-alcoholic beverage will be provided with all meals – bottled water is available everywhere. Beer and wine is available everywhere. Please note that alcoholic beverages are not included in the price of the tour.

Electricity

Costa Rica has the same electric current as the United States – 110 volts. If you are from a country that uses 220 volts, please make certain that any charger you plan on using can function at 110 volts. Most chargers today have a voltage range of 100-240 volts.

Meeting the Group

There will be a meeting in the lobby of the hotel at 7:00 pm on Day 1. This meeting is designed to "get acquainted" with the other participants on the tour, and to meet the leader. Immediately following the meeting we will have dinner. Again, we recommend trying very hard to arrive in time for this meeting.

Climate

Late March and early April can be considered the “dry” season, particularly on the Pacific slope, which half of this tour concentrates on. While the weather is somewhat unpredictable in the higher mountains, it will certainly be cool at nights, and cooler if there is damp weather. A jacket of some kind, and a rain jacket is advised. Temperatures can go down into the 40s at night. On the Pacific coast, the weather is likely to be hot and dry. Sun is much more of an issue here, and we highly recommend lots of sunscreen, and a good hat. In the Caribbean lowlands, there is always the chance for some rain.

What to Bring

Clothing – Over the years we have discovered that “everyone” has their own tastes regarding clothes. We will suggest that you consider quick-drying pants and shirts, particularly if you plan on doing your own laundry. Many of the higher quality field clothes available from companies such as “Ex Oficio” or “REI” also offer protection from UV rays. We also recommend clothes with “neutral” colors, such as browns, tans, and greens that blend with the natural environment, which is less threatening to forest birds. Bright reds and pinks should please be avoided.

Footwear – Comfortable footwear is perhaps the most important item to consider, as we are on our feet most of the day, every day! We suggest lightweight hiking boots, preferably waterproof to a certain degree. “Goretex” type boots are an excellent choice. Rubber boots are not needed for this trip.

The following items are important:

- Binoculars (waterproof)
- Camera (optional)
- Hat
- Rain Jacket (lightweight)
- Small Umbrella (ESSENTIAL!!)
- Small Flashlight w/ replacement batteries
- Small LED Headlamp (useful at poorly lit lodges)
- Alarm Clock
- Plastic Bags (to protect equipment)
- Insect Repellant
- Sunscreen (very important)
- Water Bottle
- Small backpack
- Ear Plugs (optional)

Photography: Our leaders are typically very interested in photography, in particular “digiscoping”, and within the context of the tour, photography is encouraged. Certain sensible guidelines will be adhered to, such as not approaching a bird for photos until all in the group has had a satisfying look, and we will avoid unnecessary disturbance of a

bird, particularly if it is nesting. At the end of the tour the leader will share his or her photo highlights, making them available on CD, or downloadable from a social network web site.

Field Guides and References. All books listed below are available from **Amazon.com.**

Field Guides

Garrigues, Richard, and Robert Dean. 2007. The Birds of Costa Rica: A Field Guide. Cornell University Press. Newer and recommended field guide.

Leenders, T. A Guide to Amphibians and Reptiles of Costa Rica. 2001. Zona Tropical, Miami. ISBN 0-9705678-0-4.

National Geographic Society. 2002. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America.* 4th Edition. National Geographic Society, Washington, DC.

Ridgely, Robert S. and John A. Gwynne. 1989. Second edition. *A Guide to the Birds of Panama.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Sibley, David Allen. 2000. *The Sibley Guide to Birds.* Alfred A. Knopf, New York. Arguably the best North American field guide.

Stiles, F. Gary, Alexander Skutch and Dana Gardner. 1989. *A Guide to the Birds of Costa Rica.* Ithaca NY: Comstock Publishing Associates. The older, and still excellent field guide.

References

Forsyth, Adrian and Ken Miyata. 1984. *Tropical Nature.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Janzen, Daniel H. 1983. *Costa Rican Natural History.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Kricher, J.C. 1989. *A Neotropical Companion.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Skutch, Alexander. 1954,1960,1967. *Life Histories of Central American Birds.* Vol 1-3. Cooper Ornithological Society. Pacific Coast Avifauna Series. Nos 31, 34 and 35.

_____. 1976. *Parent Birds and their Young.* Austin: University of Texas Press. Good natural history reading.

_____. 1983. *Birds of Tropical America.* Austin: University of Texas Press. Good natural history reading.

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