

Naturally ... Costa Rica

We invite you to join our tour leader, Janice Bock, as she takes you on a journey through the diverse natural beauty of stunning Costa Rica. This Central American nation is internationally renowned for its ecological biodiversity and home to a rich variety of flora, fauna and animals. Cloud forests, biological reserves, salt ponds, lagoons and more await you on this fantastic tour of discovery... "Pura Vida": the unofficial motto to one of the happiest countries on Earth – Costa Rica.

February 01: Arrival San Jose (D)

Arrive by air into San Jose. Upon arrival, our local tour manager will meet our group at the baggage claim area take us to our private charter. A welcome package awaits us including vouchers, a map and a detailed itinerary of our time in Costa Rica. We then depart for San Ramón, a fascinating town, founded by Don Ramón Rodríguez - one of the first pioneers to settle near the city. Nearby we will find unspoiled cloud forests and nature trails. Our lodging for the next few nights will be the Villa Blanca Cloud Forest Hotel, overlooking 3,000 acres of dairy pastures and pristine cloud forests.

Cloud Forest Night Tour

Exploring the mountain cloud forest at night is one of life's most amazing adventures. At night, it transforms like no other habitat in the world layered with the fragrances of nocturnal plants and flowers, and filled with the music of nature's most spectacular symphony, a cacophony of a million life forms filling the cool evening air. This is a primal world rarely seen by visitors to other parts of Costa Rica with night time photography opportunities and up close contact with some of the most colorful and fascinating creatures to be found anywhere. Dinner at Local restaurant, Overnight at Villa Blanca

February 02: Los Angeles Cloud Forest Private Biological Reserve (B / L)

Step into the heart of the mountain cloud forest, part of a unique and precious biosphere that comprises a mere 2% of the world's remaining woodlands. Beginning on the edge of the hotel property, the tour takes us into the 2,000-acre Los Angeles Cloud Forest Private Biological Reserve. We'll move within this secret world of lush, colorful tropical life along well-designed, user-friendly trails, each showcasing the incredibly diverse tropical flora and fauna of this stunning reserve.

Free afternoon to relax at our hotel and overnight at Villa Blanca

February 03: Manzanillo (B / L / D)

Breakfast at our hotel. After breakfast we travel to La Ensenada lodge. This 800 acre farm is dedicated to cattle and horses, and also to salt and hay production. Here they have developed a three step reforestation program:

- a natural return to the forest environment, that was degraded by cattle farming
- plantation of local species in selected areas
- and plantation of exotic species

Today they are proud to have more than 30% of the farm covered by forests, which helps to maintain the natural habitat. It is an ideal place for naturalists, for bird watchers and nature lovers. Overnight at Ensenada Lodge, Manzanillo

February 04: La Ensenada Lodge (B / L / D)

This morning we enjoy a trek with a local guide through Ensenada's mangrove area. The afternoon offers free time to enjoy the pool and explore the local walking trails. Following free time we take a tractor wagon tour to the salt ponds and lagoon before enjoying a cliff sunset. Overnight Ensenada Lodge.

February 05: Palo Verde Safari / Monteverde (B / D)

After breakfast travel to Palo Verde. Palo Verde National Park is the largest protected area in Guanacaste and possibly one of the most important ones in Central America. Palo Verde offers refuge and a temporary home for birds to nest and nurture their offspring. It is home to over 300 species of birds and numerous mammals, reptiles, amphibians and butterflies. Following this visit we continue to Monteverde Cloud forest. Green, breezy and cool, Monteverde Cloud forest is one of the most exciting destinations in Costa Rica. Set on a high mountain ridge, its tiny village, Santa Elena, was founded in the 50's by a small group of conservation-minded Quakers who were looking for a peaceful place to live. Its Cloud Forest Reserve is one of the most important wild life sanctuaries in the tropics. Overnight at Monteverde Country Lodge.

February 06: Santa Elena Reserve Tour (B / D)

Located in the Cordillera de Tilarán, the Santa Elena Reserve was created in 1992 and is managed by the Administrative Board of the College of Santa Elena. Their invaluable contribution is that a percentage of the money they earn is donated for the education of the youth of the community. It has an area of 310 hectares of Cloud Forest, and within it are the springs of the Chiquito and Caño Negro rivers. These combined with the Aguas Gatas canyon, constitute a large percentage of the water that reaches the Arenal Hydroelectric Plant

Visit to Colegio Tecnico San Elena

We will visit the dairy, farm, and the fish pond, each of which are used on a daily basis to provide food to students and well as for education purposes

Donn Juan coffee tour, Chocolate Tour & Sugar Cane demonstration

This tour begins with a brief insight into the wonderful world of coffee followed by the history of Costa Rican coffee, and its importance in its socio-economic development. We look at the coffee plant life cycle and it's evolution before continuing with the chocolate tour, where we will be immersed in the world of chocolate. Here we participate in the chocolate making process, have the opportunity to taste the fruit of the cacao, and observe how the small cocoa beans are magically converted into a rich tasting chocolate drink. To finish our day we will learn about the history of sugar cane farming and have the opportunity to grind cane, and taste test. Overnight at Monteverde Country Lodge

February 07: Monteverde – Arenal (B / D)

After breakfast transfer to Arenal around the lake. Arenal's perfectly symmetrical shape makes it a sightseer's dream, while its abundance of outdoor activities makes it an easy place to check things off your "must-do in Costa Rica" list. This area offers one of the nicest volcanoes in Costa Rica, a cloud forest, a lake world-famous for windsurfing and an incredibly diverse population of wildlife!

After the hotel check-in, free time to shop and enjoy a meal on our own.

16:00 - visit Eco Termales to relax in various Hot Springs Pools with the peace and serenity of the tropical rainforest, and impressive views of the Arenal Volcano. Overnight at La Pradera Hotel.

February 08: Natural History Walk in Arenal, Hanging Bridges/ Sarapiquí (B / D)

As with previous tours, we take our group through the abundant biodiversity existing in this natural reserve. A guide will educate us on this fascinating and colorful tropical rainforest world through his knowledge of natural history. Here we visit a new attraction on the Waterfall Trail and enjoy the beautiful views of the rainforest. Lastly, witness the imposing views of the volcano from the hanging bridges over the forest making today an unforgettable experience.

We then continue to the Sarapiquí area

Set on the banks of the Puerto Viejo River and next to the Braulio Carrillo National Park, Sarapiquí, has become an important destination among tourists seeking adventure or to relax in an ambience surrounded by exotic nature. It is known as one of the richest areas for bird watching. Various tours are offered by lodges including canopy, horseback, hiking, birding tours, rappelling and rafting on the Sarapiquí River.

Afternoon to relax at the lodge. Overnight at La Quinta Country Inn

February 09: Organic Pineapple tour / Palmitour (B / L)

On today's adventure our enthusiastic experts will guide us into the fields on a specially designed coach pulled by a tractor, immersing us in the organic farming world. Learn about the different sections, aspects and stages of organic pineapples, the plantation, and the production process from seeding through harvesting. We will be introduced to the history of the indigenous roots raised in plantations across Costa Rica and learn about other sustainable crops produced here including yucca, lemon and peppers. At the end of the tour, ensconced in this tropical paradise, we'll hear more about traditional Costa Rican folklore and savor delicious smoothies coupled with slices of fresh organic pineapples that will definitely impress our palates.

Palmitour. This family-run business offers customers a variety of products made from palm hearts. Here we take a guided walk through an active palmito plantation. At the end of the tour, guests are welcomed into a rustic ranch, with food tasting based on heart of palm products. Lunch will be included at this location

Overnight at La Quinta Country Inn.

February 10: Sarapiquí – Tortuguero (B / L / D)

This morning we depart for the canals lining the Atlantic Coast, where our boat trip to Tortuguero begins. One of Costa Rica's most popular eco-tourism destinations, the canals and rivers of Tortuguero National Park are a study in rainforest, freshwater and marine biology. The park and small town of Tortuguero can only be accessed by boat or small aircraft. Considered one of the world's major nesting sites for the Atlantic green turtle later in the year. Arrive at the lodge for lunch. The lodge will then schedule a tour to the village in the afternoon. This tour will provide detailed information on its history, culture and work in favor of conservation of the sea turtles and the flora and fauna in general. Following our village tour we visit the Sea Museum of the "Caribbean Conservation Corporation". Admission is included

in our cost but a donation of \$1 USD per person must be paid directly to the CCC. Overnight at Laguna Lodge.

February 11: Tortuguero National Park (B / L / D)

After breakfast our guests will enjoy the boat tours along the canals of Tortuguero. Discover a variety of birds in this National Park and receive detailed information on the flora and fauna of the area.

Return to the lodge for lunch.

Visit to Cano Palma Biological Research & Conservation Station (we are looking to arrange this possible visit)

Overnight at Laguna Lodge

February 12: Tortuguero – San Jose (B)

After breakfast, our domestic flight takes us back to San Jose.

Upon arrival in San Jose, visit the National Theater. Opened in 1897, the National Theater is a monument of the musical and artistic heritage in Costa Rica. This magnificent architectural and cultural masterpiece of San Jose presents a variety of entertainment, theater productions, plays, shows, opera, dance, and music performances.

Open afternoon. After leaving the theatre, Avenida 2 will be to our left. Walking a block and a half west along Avenida 2 to the Parque Central (the city's nucleus), we reach the Cathedral Metropolitana (the National Catholic Cathedral) and the flamboyant Teatro Popular Melico Salazar. Continue west along the pedestrian zone to the century old Mercado Central. Walking through the narrow passages we see hundreds of traditional toys, pets, wood and leather crafts, candles, religious images and smell the great mix of spices, coffee, flowers, natural herbs, fruit and food. It is a great place to stop and enjoy a typical dish "Casado", "Ceviche" or "Olla de Carne". Sodas (small restaurants) are very cheap and most of them prepare tasty dishes with fresh ingredients. Overnight at Presidente Hotel.

February 13: Departure (B)

After breakfast, hotel check-out and airport transfer for our flight back to Canada.

Air Information:

Group air flights will only be available for a group booking 320-days in advance of the tour departure. Based on present air schedules and pricing, our expectation is that the air will be approximately CAD \$900. Final air confirmation is expected on or before early April.

Land price per person / double: CAD \$3,285*

Single rate: CAD \$4,020* singles - extremely limited

*** Plus projected international air cost**

