

Costa Rica



Day 1**San José**

Depart London Heathrow for San José flying with British Airways and American Airlines in economy class (via Miami). Transfer on arrival to the Hotel San Gildar for overnight accommodation. The Hotel San Gildar is a pleasant medium size hotel situated in lovely tropical gardens, just away from the centre of town.

The modern capital city of Costa Rica, San José will probably be your initial introduction to the country. More cosmopolitan than some of its other Central American neighbours, San José is located in the central region at an altitude of 1150 metres. Whilst many people simply pass through the city on their way to the coast or the national parks, it can still be a pleasant place to spend a couple of days. Visit the many markets, the grand Opera House or marvel at the treasures on display at the Gold Museum. San José also makes a great base for exploring the surrounding countryside.

Day 2**Tortuguero**

Transfer first by road then by canoe to the Mawamba Lodge in the Tortuguero National Park. The lodge has 36 rooms all with private facilities and fans. There is a good size pool surrounded by tropical gardens, there are hammocks to lie on, trails to explore and a delightful Caribbean beach to relax on.

Granted national park status in 1970, Tortuguero (which translates as 'Land of the Turtles') is one of the world's most important turtle breeding grounds and is therefore of major environmental significance. Turtles can be found here throughout the year; however the summer months of July to September see the greatest activity. At this time tens of thousands of baby Green Turtles hatch on the beach and propel themselves en masse down towards the sea. Far smaller numbers of hatching Hawksbill and Leatherback Turtles can be seen between July and October and March to June respectively. Turtle viewing occurs at night-time and on raised platforms so as not to trouble the newly born. Venture inland and there is a good network of walking trails along with a series of waterways that allow great access to the rainforest. Over 300 species of bird have been recorded and there are a great number of brightly coloured frogs and toads along with mammals such as sloth, anteater and the elusive tapir.

Day 3 – Day 4**Tortuguero**

Guided activities from the Mawamba Lodge, or time to relax on the Caribbean coastline.

Day 5**Arenal**

Private transfer from Mawamba Lodge to Arenal (approx 5hrs). Although small, Costa Rica is home to a number of active volcanoes. Without doubt the most famous and indeed impressive of these is the magnificent Arenal Volcano. The centrepiece of the national park named in its honour, Arenal erupts on an almost daily basis; its yellow and red magma spewing high up into the sky. Dominating the surrounding skyline, Arenal is perhaps best viewed from the comfort of one of any number of hot springs that feed off the natural sulphuric waters of the volcano. The pools at Tabacón are the most developed, relax amongst the tropical vegetation and let the therapeutic waters sooth away any aches and pains.

2-nights accommodation at the Arenal Observatory Lodge. Built on a ridge two kilometres from the volcano, the lodge was originally a private observatory. The property has 37 rooms, the best of which is the Smithsonian which has huge windows offering fantastic views of the volcano.

Day 6**Arenal**

Day at leisure to explore Arenal National Park, or relax at the hot springs.

Day 7**Monteverde**

Private transfer to the Monteverde National Park. 2-nights accommodation at the Hotel Fonda Vela. One of the closest hotels to the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, the Fonda Vela's 40 spacious, light-filled rooms are scattered among the forests and pastures of this former farm, and most have views of the Nicoya Gulf. There is a bar and restaurant with great sunset views as well as a herb and vegetable garden and a network of private hiking trails. Visit Monteverde and you will be able to experience close up the wonders of the cloud forest. Enormous vine and creeper clad trees shoot up towards the light, while over 400 species of bird can be seen darting in and out of the forest canopy. The best way to explore the park is from above and an aerial skyway has been constructed which allows you the opportunity to study the whole eco-system at close quarters. Walk from bridge to bridge looking out for birds such as the wonderful Resplendent Quetzal with its multi-coloured metre long plumage. If you prefer to keep your feet on the ground there are many well marked paths to take you across the forest floor.

Day 8**Monteverde**

Day at leisure to explore the Monteverde National Park.

Day 9**Manuel Antonio**

Private transfer from the Fonda Vela to the Hotel Parador in Manuel Antonio for 4-nights accommodation. The Parador has a fantastic location close to a truly idyllic Pacific coastline. Surrounded by beautiful gardens and astonishing scenery, all the rooms have balconies or terraces with ocean or rainforest views. The rooms are tastefully decorated and include room service, cable TV, air conditioning, mini-bar, safety deposit box and ceiling fans.

Facilities include 2 infinity swimming pools with a swim up bar, an adult pool with cascading waterfall, tennis court, fitness centre, mini-golf and computer centre. You can also explore the nature trails around the 12 acre premises that take you through the lush gardens and mysterious jungle, where you are almost guaranteed to see some of the abundant wildlife such as white-faced and titi-monkeys, sloths, iguanas and many bird species. You can also take a 10 minute walk to Biesanz beach where at low tide you can see the turtle traps once made by the Quepoa Indians who lived on Punta Quepos. This small exotic beach has tiny waves and is great for swimming. Numerous other activities can be arranged by the hotel on request (to be paid locally).

Days 10 - 12**Manuel Antonio**

Days at leisure from the Hotel Parador. Choose to relax on the beach or explore Manuel Antonio National Park. The main habitats of this park are primary forest, mangrove swamps, marshes, woodland, lagoons and herbaceous swamps. Over 109 species of mammals and 184 species of birds have been recorded here, including resident species such as brown pelican, laughing falcon, black-collared hawk, white ibis, white-bellied chachalaca, white-collared cuejo, fiery-billed aracari, green kingfisher and northern jacana.

Day 13**Depart**

Drive to San José Airport and drop off the hire car. Depart San José for London Heathrow, flying with British Airways and American Airways in economy class (via Miami).

Day 14

Arrive back in the UK.