The Nature of Costa Rica

8 days

Itinerary downloaded on: April 25, 2024

Day 1: *Arrive in Costa Rica*

Today we arrive in San Jose, Costa Rica. Overnight in San Jose. Meal Plan: dinner

Day 2: *San Jose to Monteverde*

Today we drive west, up to the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve area. 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 fairytale 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, lunch and dinner

Day 3: *Monteverde*

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 we go on a "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. Overnight at Monteverde. Meal Plan: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 4: *Monteverde to Arenal*

After an early breakfast we travel to the La Fortuna/Arenal area. 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. Our hike in the Arenal Volcano National Park will reveal the secrets of how this imposing volcano has shaped the biodiversity of the area. Later, we will have time to relax in or around the various pools (bring a towel). The springs feature several hot pools with different temperatures fed by individual springs and three swim-up bars. Overnight at Arenal/La Fortuna. Meal Plan: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 5: ***Arenal to Rincon de la Vieja National Park***

Known for its stunning diversity of flora and fauna, this national park is home to two volcanoes, the Rincon de la Vieja and the Santa Maria, as well as six different volcanic peaks and 32 rivers and streams. The park has small geysers, bubbling mud pots and mineral hot springs that have earned it the name, "Costa Rica's Yellowstone." One more thing that is unique from Rincon de la Vieja Volcano is the Vrizea Vulcanicola bromeliad, endemic to this park and Costa Rica. We will have a full day here with a hike on undulating, uneven terrain along Las Pailas Trail to view the best volcanic activity you can see in the country. The trail takes us through cloud forest, open grassy slopes and near a wide array of volcanic features including impressive boiling mud pots, fumaroles and thermal streams. This afternoon you can continue your on-foot exploration on your own or take part in a number of possible activities, including river tubing, horseback riding and/or hot springs soaking. Or you can simply relax and enjoy the birdsong and magnificent views. Overnight near Rincon de la Vieja. Meal Plan: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 6: ***Arenal to Tamarindo (Guanacaste) area***

Today we descend to the Pacific Coast and continue our journey to Guanacaste, Costa Rica's sunniest region and most popular resort area. Here our time is free-form, with a well-deserved break on the beach from our busy pace in a beautiful, relaxing setting. Overnight near Guanacaste. Meal Plan: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 7: ***Guanacaste to San Jose***

Today we return by road to San Jose. We will visit the Gold Museum in downtown San Jose, easily the country's best with thousands of different examples of Pre-Columbian gold artefacts. Overnight in San Jose. Meal Plan: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 8: ***Departure from San Jose***