



Wild Globe Travel Consultancy

Tailored Wildlife, Wilderness and Adventure Travel Across the Globe.

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Costa Rica Explorer - 30 Days

Major Destinations

San Jose - Braulio Carrillo National Park - La Selva Biological Station - Tirimbina Rainforest Lodge - Arenal Volcano - Monteverde - Manuel Antonio - Damas Mangrove - Drake Bay - Cano Island - Terraba-Sierpe Reserve - Corcovado National Park - Sirena Biological Station - Osa Peninsula - Puerto Jimenez



Tour Highlights and Activities

I have heard several destinations described as the new Costa Rica in recent years and although it is certainly true that other less well traversed Central American countries rival both the beauty and diversity of this famous wildlife destination, to me Costa Rica has retained its charm and remains one of those countries that everyone interested in all forms of wildlife should visit at least once. In addition to the genuine warmth of the local people and some of the most breathtaking scenery possible, the sheer joy of Costa Rica is that it is almost impossible to travel anywhere without encountering spectacular wildlife, be it a brightly coloured frog, a shimmering butterfly or a three-toed sloth sleeping in the garden of your hotel. Lots of entertaining distractions now vie for your attention, including superb white-water rafting, exhilarating zip lines, excellent diving and some truly fabulous beaches, but the soul of Costa Rica remains its wild areas and the fascinating animals that inhabit them. On this tour we will experience all of the major highlights of a country whose citizens have been officially recognised as the happiest people on earth and by the end of our special adventure it will be very easy to see why.

Day 1 - San Jose to La Selva Biological Station

Arrive in the capital San Jose and take the short drive north through Braulio Carrillo National Park to La Selva Biological Station, the first of two renowned research stations that we will visit bordering the park. Being a working field station, regularly frequented by eminent international scientists studying tropical ecosystems, La Selva is fairly basic in terms of accommodation and there are several other more luxurious lodges within a few minutes drive if the thought of a swimming pool appeals in what are likely to be fairly humid conditions. However, if you can resist a pool for a few days, the facilities at La Selva are perfectly adequate and by staying at the field station we are able to walk all of the trails unaccompanied at any time, including throughout the night with spotlights. This of course provides us with a massive advantage in terms of spotting wildlife, particularly mammal species, as we can explore the forest in the early morning and late evening when no day visitors are allowed and a number of different mammals are more active. Depending on how tired everyone is, we can go for an initial night walk after dinner with the immediate possibility of seeing a wide variety of wildlife, including nine-banded armadillo, Mexican porcupine, kinkajou, northern raccoon, spotted paca and of course an incredible variety of amphibians, reptiles, arachnids and insects.

Days 2 to 3 - La Selva Biological Station

Although La Selva is rightfully regarded as one of the most diverse areas in Costa Rica, and has consistently attracted some of the

most notable scientific studies over more than 30 years, her dense, largely primary tropical forests do not divulge their secrets easily, certainly not by day. We will therefore spend the majority of our time here patiently walking a 60km network of well maintained forest trails, partly on our own and partly with experienced local guides, who will almost certainly be the first to spot both the two and



three-toed sloths that we are likely to encounter. Collared peccary are another of the larger mammals that we will routinely observe, as they are used to human activity and often sleep beside the buildings for safety at night. La Selva is also home to three of the countries four primate species, the mantled howler monkey, the white-throated capuchin and the central American spider monkey, which will probably be seen hanging from their prehensile tails staring down at us quizzically as we stare back up at them. Another highlight of our stay will be a gentle afternoon boat ride on the beautiful Sarapiquí River and a chance to take a well-earned rest and let the shimmering waters deliver a feast of wildlife, including neotropical otter, which are regularly spotted on this stretch of river and even from the main bridge within La Selva. Reptiles are also frequently encountered either on the riverbank,

most notably caiman and American crocodile, or in the overhanging trees where huge iguanas bask in the heat of the afternoon. Stunning green basilisks and the delightfully named Jesus Christ Lizard, so called due to its ability to run across the surface of the water, are also common and the bird life is even more remarkable, as almost half of the 900 bird species recorded in Costa Rica can be found at La Selva, either along the river or on the trails as we penetrate deeper into the forest. Dazzling hummingbirds flitter dramatically from plant to plant in a blaze of colour, trogons and tanagers compete with equally exotically coloured toucans at eye level, while secretive tinamou and less well concealed curassow disturb the decaying vegetation of the forest floor. In terms of the variety of wildlife and initial pace of our trip, La Selva could hardly be a better destination for us to start and we will hopefully also see the strawberry poison frog, which is something of a trademark animal here and is usually spotted at least once or twice on each trip. Ocelot are also chanced upon, one in particular is known to cross the bridge at night, tayra are intermittently observed, I saw one scamper across a path and out of sight on my last visit, and agouti and variegated squirrel are two of the easier mammals to find, particularly in the less dense secondary forest areas.

Day 4 - La Selva Biological Station to Tirimbina Rainforest Lodge

This morning we have the option of taking a last walk at La Selva or leaving immediately for our next destination Tirimbina Rainforest Lodge, which is only about a twenty-minute drive from La Selva. Although another working field station with a well established reputation, particularly regarding the study of bats, Tirimbina is run more as a comfortable lodge than La Selva and will provide us with a slightly better opportunity to look for a specific group of nocturnal species, which are frequently seen crossing the wires of the suspension bridge that link the main accommodation section to the network of forest trails. As was the case at La Selva, we can either take our meals at the lodge or can take a short drive into town for a selection of nice restaurants.

Days 5 to 6 - Tirimbina Rainforest Lodge

Given its close proximity to La Selva, the species found at Tirimbina are more or less identical and it is therefore somewhat surprising that the two locations differ greatly in terms of the wildlife likely to be seen at each. The days at Tirimbina can be fairly tough, as the

primates are much harder to find here and even the two sloth species generally appear to be less commonly observed. However, the evenings are an entirely different matter, particularly just after dusk, when a flurry of furry activity descends on the bridge and a procession of nocturnal mammals leave the forest and head obligingly towards our waiting spotlights on the lodge side of the river. Mexican porcupine, common and woolly opossum, kinkajou and northern raccoon invariably join the stampede at some stage and it is not uncommon to have two or three species scurrying past within a few minutes or even seconds of each other. On one particularly memorable occasion I was photographing a kinkajou in a tree only to be told that a porcupine was running across one level of the bridge while a common opossum charged along the opposite side. Obviously not every night is as dramatic,



and the raccoon sightings can be a bit hit or miss, but most of these animals are seen regularly and when the initial rush subsides our guide will take us on the opposite journey across the bridge and into the forest to search for other wildlife, including armadillo and spotted paca. Unfortunately no independent walking is allowed on the trails after dark, or before 7am in the morning, although

thankfully the guides take a fairly relaxed view regarding the bridge itself and we will have the opportunity to traverse it on our own late at night and just before dawn if necessary. As per La Selva, and in fact more or less every significant forest in Costa Rica, Tirimbina is home to an extraordinary array of wildlife and is a great place to see the Honduran white bat, which sleep huddled together in small groups under carefully folded leaves and are consequently sometimes referred to as tent bats. Given that a great deal of the research here involves the study of bats, and that the 113 known bat species represent almost 50% of the mammals in Costa Rica, it is perhaps not surprising that one of the most popular activities at Tirimbina is the evening bat programme. During the presentation researchers will introduce some of the bats trapped that evening for research purposes, they are held for less than two hours and are released unharmed, and will also take the group out to one of the capture sites and explain how exactly the bats are trapped. Other options include guided walks specifically to see birds and frogs, the former departing early morning and the latter after dinner, as well as an interesting local tour to see how the simple Cocoa bean is transformed into chocolate. Boat trips are again available on the Sarapiquí River and, if you feel more adventurous, we can go rafting and experience some thrilling white water under the very bridge that we will have been watching mammals on the night before.

Day 7 - Tirimbina Rainforest Lodge to Monteverde

Given that Tirimbina is not as productive during the day, we will leave relatively early this morning to allow us to drive to Monteverde at our leisure and to stop and enjoy several views of the impressive Arenal Volcano and the equally stunning Arenal Lake. Although the volcano has not erupted since 2010, if there is any activity we can extend our time here in order to experience the dramatic lava flows at night and there is also the option of taking a slight detour to visit the picturesque La Fortuna Waterfall and taking a refreshing swim in the inviting pool at the bottom of the falls. We will break for lunch at a hillside lodge overlooking the lake and have a good chance of encountering white-nosed coati at several points of the journey, as these intelligent and resourceful members of the raccoon family have discovered that when we stop to take in the views, food often follows and it is not unusual to see groups of twenty or more swarming around the parked cars. Depending on the number of stops, we will probably arrive in Monteverde mid afternoon and will check into our lodge before going out on a first exciting night walk in what is one of my favourite parts of Costa Rica. In addition to its excellent facilities, the heated swimming pool is certainly most welcome given the increase in altitude and corresponding decrease in temperature, our accommodation for the next four nights is one of the best in the area in terms of wildlife and we will have the opportunity to look for a wide variety of animals as we explore the sprawling grounds and adjoining forest. Two-toed sloth, armadillo, coati, northern raccoon, agouti and various opossum species are all resident and the hanging bird feeders often attract almost as many squirrels as they do birds.



Days 8 to 10 - Monteverde

Despite that fact that mammals are notoriously difficult to locate within dense cloud forest, our days at Monteverde are likely to be among the most productive of the trip, mainly due to the incredibly knowledgeable local guide that I use and the fact that between us we have discovered several reliable sites for certain specific animals. There are a lot of biological reserves in Monteverde, all protecting a slightly different habitat, and we will probably visit six or seven of these in order to maximise our chances of seeing as many species as possible. Conversely, we will not visit some of the more popular destinations at all, particularly regarding our night walks, as our guide knows the area intimately and has a number of locations that he likes to explore at night with generally incredible results. At one particular destination we are likely to see two-toed sloth, grey fox, hooded skunk, well beyond their accepted range, Mexican porcupine, kinkajou, one or two opossum species, armadillo and possibly even northern tamandua. At another he will take us to see the highly secretive tapeti or forest rabbit and at yet a third we will have the opportunity to search for a pair of coyotes that have been seen reasonably regularly. One of the highlights of our stay here will probably occur within a few metres of the popular Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve, as bushy-tailed Olingos have taken to raiding the feeders at the adjacent hummingbird



gallery and generally appear for at least a few minutes every evening. Olingos are in the same raccoon family as the kinkajou, but they are much harder to see and far less likely to hang around if they are spotted. Consequently, very few people are ever fortunate enough to see them, or at least to get good prolonged views, and I consider that this spot is the best area in either Central or South America to



see any of the olingo species. Our destinations during the day have also been carefully selected, either in order to again give us the best chance to see animals or in terms of the ideal habitat to enable our guide to explain the subtle differences between the ascending levels of cloud forest and how this fascinating and extremely complex ecosystem works. In the process we will have our first chance to see red brocket deer, long-tailed weasel and greater grison are also a possibility, albeit unlikely ones, as well as mantled howler monkey, agouti, white-nosed coati, northern raccoon and probably three squirrel species, variegated, deppe's and red-tailed. For many who visit Monteverde the holy grail is the resplendent quetzal, a truly outstanding bird that we could easily come across on one of the trails, as we will already be visiting a few of their preferred areas, or which we can search specifically for if that

appeals. The Bat Jungle and The Frog Pond, both of which are run by dedicated conservationists, are also worth a visit if time permits and different views and levels of the forest canopy can be experienced from the various hanging bridges, an aerial tram and a choice of exciting zip lines. Although the latter have been introduced very much as a tourist activity, they can be a lot of fun and do give people an idea of what researchers go through in order to explore the canopy 30 or 40 metres above the forest floor. Monteverde itself is a very friendly town with a great atmosphere and in the evenings we can enjoy some of the excellent local restaurants, including the highly unusual Tree House, which is literally built around a huge fig tree.

Day 11 - Monteverde to Manuel Antonio

Depending on whether there are any remaining areas that we want to explore, we will probably leave Monteverde after breakfast this morning, to take a leisurely drive along the coastal road for splendid views of the Pacific and an opportunity to stop at the Tarcoles River to see the large number of American crocodiles that gather expectantly under a bridge waiting to be fed. This may not be the most natural encounter that we will have of the trip, but the huge crocodiles are certainly impressive and it is always nice to see how many locals take the time to stop and appreciate these and many other animals all over the country. When we arrive in Manuel Antonio we will check into our superb resort and begin exploring, as our accommodation has again been chosen with wildlife in mind and is nestled within several acres of fertile rainforest. With direct access to two pristine sandy beaches and exceptional views of the Pacific, this will be the perfect base for our stay at Manuel Antonio and our resort attracts so much wildlife that resident naturalists are employed to help visitors identify the 160 or so bird species found just within the grounds. Both types of sloth are spotted daily and Central American squirrel monkeys, the only primates that we will not yet have seen, visit regularly to raid the fruiting trees. Giant lizards bask besides guests on sun loungers doing exactly the same thing and in the evening raccoons and armadillos dart across the lawns as a multitude of diverse frogs bring the forest alive with their nightly chorus.



Days 12 to 14 - Manuel Antonio

While the majority of tourists visit Manuel Antonio for the idyllic beaches, the area is a genuinely good one for wildlife and there are a few hidden gems if you know exactly where and when to look. The highlight of our stay here will almost certainly be a boat tour of the Damas Mangrove and a chance to look for the silky or pygmy anteater, as this diminutive nocturnal creature inhabits large parts of Central and South America but is almost impossible to find. As with the olingo in Monteverde, this is the one reliable area in which you can actively search for this animal and we are likely to be successful given a little luck and a second tour if necessary. The beauty of finding this rare animal, which, during the day at least, resembles a lumpy orange tennis ball stuck in a tree, is that we can go back at night and kayak into the mangrove to watch the ball slowly unfold and begin its nocturnal foraging. This is a great experience and when we have finished with the kayaks we will take to a larger boat and continue spotlighting for another highly elusive mammal, the water opossum. These mangroves are excellent for a variety of opossum species, including common and grey four-eyed opossum, but the strikingly patterned water opossum will be our main target, as they are easier to find here than any other destination of which I am

aware. In addition to a number of snakes, our nights in the mangrove should also reward us with several good sightings of crab-eating raccoon, which hang nonchalantly in the palm trees and are strikingly similar to their northern relations. Although Manuel Antonio is the smallest national park in Costa Rica, and can become incredibly busy at certain times, it retains a certain charm if more viewed as



a large residential park that the locals and a throng of tourists use for a gentle stroll to yet another excellent beach. It is actually one of the best places to see sloth in all of Costa Rica, one of my guides saw eleven in less than an hour, and is also a good spot for white-tailed deer, which feed at the forest edge in the early evening when most of the crowds have left via the beach. Night walks are not allowed in the park, which is understandable given its size and how many people visit during the day, but other nearby reserves are certainly worth a visit in terms of a number of nocturnal animals. Nightly amphibian and reptile tours are conducted at the Rainmaker Conservation Project, which, with hanging bridges, pretty waterfalls and tempting swimming holes, can also be a nice option during the day away from the main crowds. Marine tours to look for whales and dolphins are also available, as are a plethora of other leisure activities aimed at

the tourist market, from diving, snorkelling and white water rafting to horse riding and, of course, zip lines. The restaurants in town are always busy and full of local flavour and my favourite, in terms of the setting at least, is probably El Avion, which is built around an actual Fairchild cargo plane purchased by the CIA in the 1980's in order to supply arms and equipment to the Nicaraguan guerrilla fighters known as the 'Contras'. One of two planes used in the covert operation, the sister plane was shot down over Nicaragua and the subsequent capture of one of the CIA operatives on board led to the Iran-Contra Affair, one of the most notorious political scandals in American history.

Day 15 - Manuel Antonio to Drake Bay

After a busy few days, today will be a very leisurely affair, as we can spend much of the morning relaxing at our resort before driving south along the coast to Drake Bay. The latter part of the drive can be an interesting one, as the last 30kms are on a totally unpaved road, which can be fairly rough depending on the weather conditions. In any case, our four-wheel drive will have no major problems and we can have a bit of fun taking some fairly steep hills and splashing through a few rivers. Our home for the next five nights is one of my favourite lodges in the country, as the wildlife here is as diverse as most reserves and the private two-storey cabins have been designed without any glass, to perfectly frame the surrounding forest and captivating Pacific views. Sloths, monkeys and a multitude of gorgeous birds can all be viewed from the hammocks on the cabin decks and when you fall asleep at night, to the haunting cacophony of the forest, you somehow feel as if you are part of it all and that all is right with the world. The mornings are just as harmonious, as the melodic birdsong acts as a natural alarm and it is difficult to imagine waking up in a lovelier setting or to a more glorious view.

Days 16 to 19 - Drake Bay

Generally viewed as a gateway to Corcovado National Park, not many first-time visitors spend more than a day or two at Drake Bay, which is a shame in many ways, as the area is astoundingly beautiful and some of the wildlife activities are as enjoyable and productive as anywhere in the country. One of the best is the whale and dolphin watching tour, which is led by highly experienced marine guides and on which, in the right season, we have a very realistic chance of seeing humpback and pilot whales, as well as a reasonable possibility of killer whale and bryde's whale. Dolphins are even more common and, with a little good fortune, we could encounter Pantropical spotted dolphin, common bottlenose dolphin, spinner dolphin, short-beaked common dolphin, rough-toothed dolphin and false killer whale. We are also likely to see marine mammals when we take the snorkelling trip to Cano Island Biological Marine Reserve, a protected area which lies about 20km offshore from Drake Bay. With appealing turquoise waters and generally superb visibility, this is one of the best snorkelling and dive sites in Costa Rica and the island is also an interesting one to explore, as it was once used as an ancient burial ground and trails lead to some archaeological artefacts and across the island to an elevated and extremely impressive view out over the Pacific. The snorkelling itself is first class, as glittering shoals of brightly



coloured fish dart in every direction and turtles, rays, octopus, moray eels, barracuda and reef shark are just a few of the creatures that it is possible to encounter. Although we will be spending several days within Corcovado National Park, our time there will be utilised exploring trails around one specific area and we will therefore take the opportunity whilst we are at Drake Bay to visit the San Pedrillo section of the park, which is only a twenty-minute boat ride from our lodge. This will be a good introduction to the park, as we are likely to see all four primate species in one place for the first time and a great deal of the other wildlife that Corcovado is justly



famed for and which I have described in greater detail within the main national park section below. After another opportunity to see whales and dolphins on the boat transfer, our day will begin with a wet landing, there are no docks for the incoming boats at Corcovado, followed by comfortable hikes along two main trails, the second of which ends at a pretty waterfall and a chance to take an invigorating swim after a long walk in fairly humid conditions. The boat tour of the mangroves in the Terraba-Sierpe Reserve will be another superb day, with an amazing variety of wildlife as we navigate the myriad channels of what is the largest protected mangrove in Central America. Given the sublime setting and abundant wildlife, the horse rides at Drake Bay are also among the best in Costa Rica and the combination of riding along deserted sandy beaches, through pristine forests and up winding mountain trails is

as magical as it sounds. The bug tour is yet another local gem, as a highly enthusiastic and incredibly knowledgeable biologist introduces us to the fascinating nocturnal world of insects and arachnids. If we have not already seen a few tarantulas, we are very likely to on this particular evening and the lady's husband is just as familiar with the amphibians and reptiles that we will also encounter. Most of the activities at Drake Bay are treated as full day tours, as they leave fairly early each morning, however, in reality, they generally return by mid afternoon and we will therefore have plenty of time to also enjoy our idyllic lodge, including an opportunity to kayak independently on the peaceful Agujitas River, which backs directly onto the lodge.

Day 20 - Drake Bay to Corcovado National Park

As difficult as it will be to leave the solitude and tranquillity of our beautiful lodge, we at least depart in the knowledge that the final destinations of our tour are among the best wildlife areas on the planet, as for me, Corcovado National Park and the Osa Peninsula are the real beating heart of Costa Rica. Our actual start will be an early one, although within a few days it may well not feel like it, as our boat transfer to the Sirena Biological Station at Corcovado departs at 6am. The transfer takes about an hour and a half along the coast, unless of course we find any whales or dolphins to delay us slightly, and by no later than about 8am we should be strolling along the airstrip for a first look at Sirena. Whilst it has retained much of its unique atmosphere and charm, if I am honest, the facilities at this famous old research station are not as good as they should be and it would not be too difficult to update the place slightly without turning it into yet another anonymous luxury lodge. That said, we will at least have private rooms for the next five nights and no one visits Sirena for the facilities. A highly experienced local guide here is essential and we will have one for all five days, whether we use them for the entire time or decide to walk a few trails on our own. This is generally a good idea at times, as no night walking is allowed at Sirena and it is therefore necessary to get up very early, between 3am and 4am is normal, in order to spotlight for a host of elusive nocturnal animals, including five species of cat.



Days 21 to 24 - Corcovado National Park

Apart from the odd swimming hole, there is absolutely nothing to do at Sirena except walk the trails and look for wildlife, which is very much the appeal of the place for most visitors. Corcovado remains a wild, untamed land, where something is always happening and where there is always something special to see. No two days or two walks are ever alike and where you were thrilled by an extended sighting of a tayra the day before, today a black guan hops around the same branches. At night pumas come and take the sloths and peccaries that you were watching just a few hours before and, in the middle of the day, in the brightest possible sunlight, an ocelot decides to stroll across the lawn directly in front of the field station. At the beach pelicans fly by in perfect formation, whilst scarlet macaws, dripping with colour, adorn the evocative palms and industrious coatis feast themselves on crabs below. Where else in the world can you walk across a river at low tide photographing sting rays, crocodiles and puffer fish, only to return a few hours later to photograph menacing bull sharks patrolling exactly the same stretch of river. On one walk the impatient squeals of otter pups may alert you to a mother



fishing nearby and on another a barely perceptible rustle may just prompt you to look up and discover a tamandua furtively peering through the vegetation at you. The Sirena and Claro rivers are the best areas to find Baird's tapir, a unique looking animal and the largest land mammal in Central America. Searching for these rare and gentle mammals is usually unnecessary, if you are prepared to



sit patiently at the right spot in the early morning and wait for one to swim down the river and wander calmly into the forest to find a quiet place to spend the day sleeping. Although jaguar sightings are incredibly rare, they are here and people do occasionally see them, but puma and ocelot are far more likely and jaguarondi and margay are also observed, albeit on an infrequent basis. The long grass and forest around the airstrip is a good place to look for red brocket deer and collared and white-lipped peccary coexist within the same areas, although the collared variety are more commonly encountered. All four monkeys are often seen on each walk of any length, sloths abound but can be difficult to see well within the dense forest and all of the main nocturnal animals are possible when we spotlight in the early hours, including striped hog-nosed skunk, greater grison and northern naked-tailed armadillo. The scenery is almost as spectacular as the wildlife,

particularly along the primeval Pacific coastline, and after just a day or two you find yourself drifting effortlessly into the natural rhythms of the surrounding wilderness. Our time at Corcovado will slip by all too quickly, but the memories will stay with us forever.

Day 25 - Corcovado National Park to Osa Peninsula

In terms of having to leave Corcovado today things could be much worse, as we do not actually have to depart until around midday, which will give us an opportunity for one last hike and a chance to say goodbye to the endearing tapirs. In addition, the final destination of our magnificent tour is also very special and so is our mode of transport, as we take a spectacular light aircraft flight over Corcovado and the Osa Peninsula before landing in Puerto Jimenez, the gateway to our nature lodge. As far as the facilities are concerned at least, we are now moving from the ridiculous to the sublime, as our accommodation for the next five days is one of the finest eco lodges I have visited. Set within 750 acres of forest and perched on a cliff with staggering ocean views, our lodge more resembles our own private Garden of Eden than a tourist destination and it is heartening to know that the long-term owners have played a major part in the conservation and regeneration of the area, as much of the forest which now supports an astounding array of wildlife had at one time been stripped bare for farming.

Days 26 to 29 - Osa Peninsula Rainforest Lodge

Whether it is the fact that parts of the sprawling grounds comprise secondary forest, which is always easier to see animals in, or whether the animals are just more used to people here, the real beauty of our final location is that it is so easy to see wildlife with relatively little effort. Of course the more hours you spend on the extensive network of well maintained forest trails the more you will probably see, but long treks are not necessary and we are just as likely to encounter coati, all of the monkey species, tamandua, peccary, armadillo, opossum and agouti in or around the cultivated garden sections than deep within the forest. Sloths are regularly photographed clinging to their favoured cecropia trees and tayra, puma, ocelot, jaguarondi and tapir are all resident and are seen from time to time. Of course this lodge does not feel as wild as Corcovado, but it is different in a positive way and it is always a great pleasure to see so many animals behaving naturally within such close proximity of people. The various ponds, sympathetically created from natural springs, attract a massive variety of frogs, including red-eyed tree frog and green and black poison frog, and a wonderful suspension bridge provides a superb vantage point of one of the many attractive creeks that decorate the property. The bird life is as rich and colourful as you would expect given the gloriously natural setting, scarlet macaws, toucans and several species of hummingbirds are particular favourites, and the small botanical garden is an ideal location to relax during the day and watch dozens of different birds



come and go. The delightful and highly private cabanas attract various visitors throughout the day and night, Mexican mouse opossums have been encountered in more than one room, and it is even possible to watch humpback whales breaching majestically from the comfort of your secluded hammock. Although we will obviously spend much of our time exploring the trails and gardens here, the location of our lodge, ideally situated on the tip of the peninsula at the confluence of the Pacific and Golfo Dulce, also provides us with the opportunity to take two first class boat tours. The first takes place in the Golfo Dulce or Gulf of Dulce, a large inlet which separates the Osa Peninsula from mainland Costa Rica, and will almost certainly guarantee excellent dolphin sightings and possibly whales and whale sharks in the right season. There are several resident dolphin species and it is very rare not to encounter any of them. In fact, they are usually seen in impressive numbers and you will even have the rather unique opportunity of entering the

water and being dragged behind the boat on a body board as the dolphins frolic beside you in the wake created by our vessel. Our second boat tour is slightly less dramatic but just as enjoyable, as we cross the Golfo Dulce to begin gently cruising along the scenic



Esquinas River. This will be a fitting end in terms of our river trips in Costa Rica, as the Esquinas runs through some remarkable landscapes and we will see a great deal of wildlife, particularly reptiles and waterbirds, as we drift peacefully along the meandering estuaries and deltas in the late afternoon sun. Kayaking here is also an entertaining option and several beaches can be accessed from the trails of our lodge, while snorkelling in the Golfo Dulce is especially rewarding when whale sharks are in the area, as it is always an immense privilege to spend time in the water with these gentle leviathans. Perhaps surprisingly, one of our best wildlife experiences will not actually be a wild one at all, as we will also visit The Osa Wildlife Sanctuary across the bay on the mainland adjoining Piedras Blancas National Park. The sanctuary supports injured and orphaned animals with the ultimate intention of returning as many as possible

to the wild. They have been highly successful in this endeavour over the years and while our tour will provide us with a wonderful opportunity to observe a number of rare species in an intimate setting, the donations that we make will help to support their essential work.

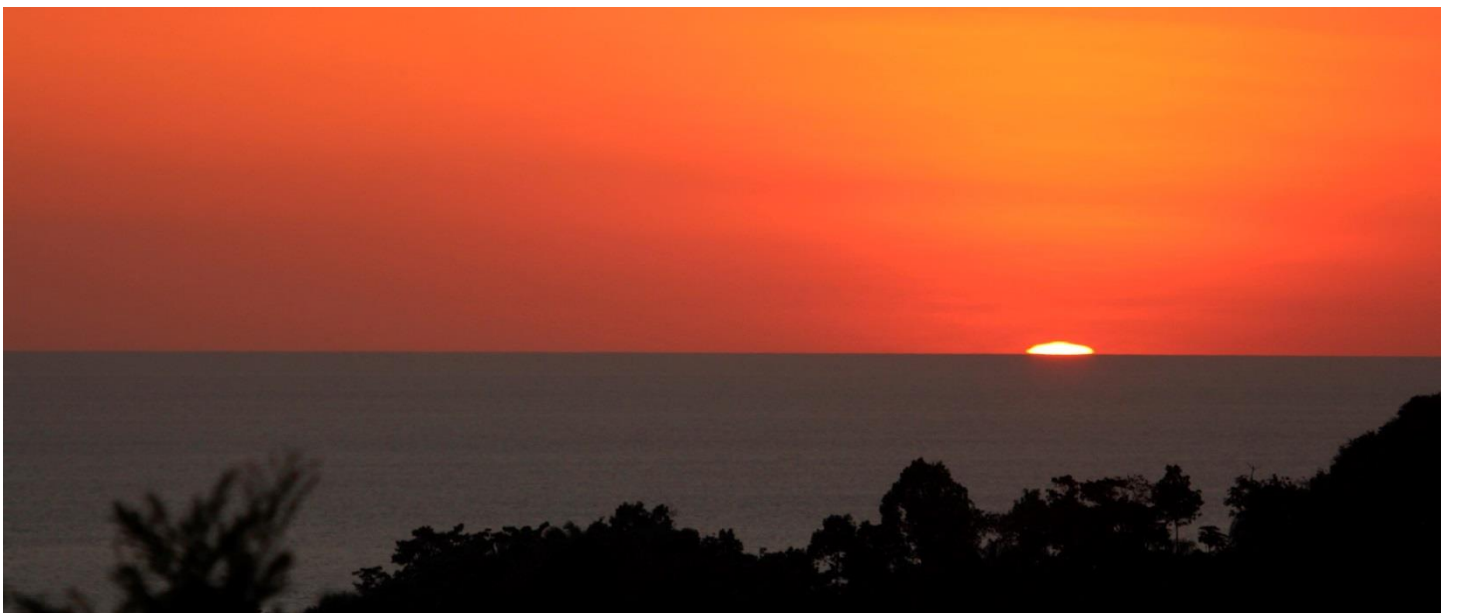
Day 30 - Osa Peninsula Rainforest Lodge to Puerto Jimenez to San Jose

Today is the last day of our tour and, if it feels as if we are leaving paradise, that is because we probably are. However, we will have visited some stunning locations, and undoubtedly encountered some of the most beautiful and rarest animals imaginable, and a host of wonderful memories will hopefully sustain us until the next exciting trip. After a leisurely breakfast and perhaps a last wistful walk around the grounds, we will take the short transfer to Puerto Jimenez for the scheduled flight to San Jose and connecting international flights. If required I am happy to arrange overnight accommodation in San Jose, depending on the timing of onward flights.

Additional Options

As with most of my tours, this one has been designed as an introduction to the country and, more specifically, to the wildlife of the country. However, it really is only an introduction and Costa Rica has many more wonderful destinations to explore. Tortuguero, on the sun drenched Caribbean coast, is unlike any other part of the country and the national park supports a wealth of wildlife, including jaguar, tapir and a population of West Indian manatee. Various species of turtle come to lay their eggs on the beaches here and it is possible to organise a tour to witness this special event. Further north, a few miles from the border of Nicaragua, lie the lush wetlands of Cano Negro, home to the magnificent jabiru stork and a host of other exotic birds and mammals. Despite its outstanding beauty, Rincon de la Vieja, the name of both the national park and the active volcano within it, is far less visited than most parks and is perfect for hiking and horse riding away from major crowds. One of the nearby lodges has built a 420m waterslide that drops spectacularly down a forested mountain, which may not be entirely environmentally friendly, but is certainly a great deal of fun. Dozens of stunning beaches adorn both the Pacific and Caribbean coastlines and the surfing here has been regarded as some of the best in the world for several decades. Mai Pais, on the Nicoya Peninsula, has a particularly good reputation, both in terms of the quality of the surfing and the solitude that it can be enjoyed in, as this is one of the least developed villages on the coast and lies within a few kilometres of Cabo Blanco Absolute Reserve. In addition to supporting a great deal of wildlife, and being one of the better spots to see margay, white-tailed deer and coyote in Costa Rica, Cabo Blanco is important because it was the first major conservation project in Central America and was established as a result of the efforts of the Swedish immigrant Olof Wessberg, at a time when unrestricted commercial development threatened to destroy the country's last remaining forests and natural areas. Wessberg was later tragically murdered by land developers while campaigning for a second reserve on the Osa Peninsula, but Corcovado National Park was created in his honour and the people of Costa Rica, and every visitor since in fact, have this one pioneering Swede to thank for the fact that this breathtakingly beautiful country remains one of the premier wildlife destinations on the planet.









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