



COSTA RICA

A Birding the Tropics Starter Kit

March 18 – March 28, 2024
From San José

Guides: Nathan Goldberg and local guide
Group size: 5-8

\$4520 per person sharing | \$400 single supplement

See the tour webpage here: redhillbirding.com/costarica

To register for this tour, go to: redhillbirding.com/bookingform

Costa Rica has long been a mecca for birders. The national philosophy of embracing and encouraging ecotourism shows in its heavily forested countryside and wonderful tourist infrastructure. It's a tiny country, easy to get to, and easy to get around in. And it has absolutely incredible birding in a small area that covers a wide diversity of habitats. This Birding the Tropics Starter Kit trip is designed to sample this diversity of Costa Rican habitats—from the Central highlands around the capital, to the Caribbean lowland rainforest, back up to the Pacific Slope montane cloud forest, and finally dropping down into the Pacific Coast lowlands. You will leave Costa Rica wanting to come back soon!

We should see an impressive assortment of tropical birds: antbirds and manakins and motmots and in the lowlands, highland specialists like Resplendent Quetzal, Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, and endemic warblers and hummingbirds in the highlands, and a variety of tanagers, trogons, hummingbirds, and parrots everywhere (and even both Scarlet and Great Green Macaws). Wintering migrants will also still be around, so we'll get to see familiar warblers, vireos, and orioles before they visit us again in the US come spring.



Speckled Tanager photo by Josh Engel

DAILY ITINERARY

Day 1, Mon, Mar 18. Arrival to San Jose. Night: San José.

We will transfer to our hotel in San Jose for the night. If there is time, we will take a walk around the hotel grounds and start familiarizing ourselves with Costa Rican birds, perhaps finding birds like Blue-gray Tanager, Rufous-naped Wren, Spot-breasted Oriole, Grayish Saltator, and Hoffman's Woodpecker.

Day 2, Tue, Mar 19. San Jose to Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí. Night: Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí.

After pre-breakfast birding at the hotel, we will head northwest towards the Caribbean slope lowlands, a drive of under two hours. But first the road passes through the spectacular foothill forest of Braulio Carrillo National Park and we will stop to get our first taste of forest birds. This might include birds like Broad-billed Motmot, Keel-billed Toucan, and Golden-browed Chlorophonia. No doubt we will encounter tanagers, woodcreepers, and other Neotropical families. We may stop at a feeder set up or two, including one at a café whose feeders attract birds like tanagers, barbets, hummingbirds, toucans, and maybe even guans. We will make it to our hotel in the late afternoon, with just enough time to get our first sample of lowland birds.

Day 3, Wed, Mar 20: Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí area. Night: Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí.

Lowland rainforest is the world's most biodiverse habitat. The high-quality forests in this region and prime territory to witness this diversity, with incredible birds along with monkeys, sloths, lizards, and spectacular insects. Here we will get to see those legendary tropical birds like antbirds, antwrens, manakins, puffbirds, motmots, toucans, trogons, tanagers, becards, curassows, and cotingas. Among the many more common birds that we might see are Great Curassow, Rufous and Broad-billed Motmots, Chestnut and Cream-colored Woodpecker, White-crowned Parrot, Bright-rumped Attila, Montezuma Oropendola, and Black-faced Grosbeak. We will also look for some of the regions specialty birds, including the enormous Great Green Macaw and the beautiful Snowy Cotinga. If we are very lucky, we may find Three-wattled Bellbird.

After darkness falls, we can return to the field to look for nocturnal birds like Middle American Screech-Owl, Spectacled Owl, and Great Potoo.

Day 4, Thu, Mar 21: Sarapiquí to Arenal.

We will have a final morning to soak in the lowland rainforest, before working our way to Arenal, where the Arenal Volcano dominates the landscape. No doubt we will stop for birding along the route—one of the great things about Costa Rica is its many accessible birding hotspots along the major roadways. Arriving to Arenal, the volcano's forested slopes are home to a bewildering array of tropical birds--toucans and tanagers and motmots and manakins,

among many, many others. Our lodge grounds will have great birding, so we won't need to venture far to see many of these.

Day 5, Fri, Mar 22: Arenal area.

The Arenal Volcano is one of the dominant landmarks of northern Costa Rica. We will search for many birds here, including rich mixed flocks that could contain Emerald and Bay-headed Tanagers, Spotted Woodcreeper, Buff-throated Foliage-gleaner, and many others. This area is host to plenty of rare birds, too, that we would be lucky to come across, birds like Bare-necked Umbrellabird, Lovely Cotinga, Yellow-eared Toucanet, and Keel-billed Motmot.

We will spend some time visiting the wonderful preserve of Sendero Bogarín, known to tourists as a great place to find sloths, but to birders as a place with a fantastic feeder setup and home to (relatively) obliging Uniform and White-throated Crake.

Day 6, Sat, Mar 23: Arenal to Savegre. Night: Savegre Valley.

After a final morning around the lodge at Arenal, we will make our way back around San Jose and south to the higher elevations of the Savegre Valley around the village of San Gerardo de Dota. It's a fairly long drive, but through beautiful countryside and we will stop along the way for birding and for lunch. We will end the day in the beautiful forested valley at an elevation over 7,000ft.

Day 7, Sun, Mar 24: Savegre area. Night: Savegre Valley.

The Savegre area is perhaps best known for being one of the most reliable places in Costa Rica to see Resplendent Quetzal, one of the world's most spectacular birds, and we will make our best effort to see them. This is prime time to find them since they are nesting and often their nest sites are known.

But of course the birding here is excellent and we will look for many high-elevation species that we won't be able to see elsewhere on the trip, including many sought-after species that are only found in the highlands of Costa Rica and western Panama. These include Slaty Flowerpiercer, Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Black Guan, Black-capped Flycatcher, Timberline Wren, Yellow-thighed Finch, Yellow-winged Vireo, Spangle-cheeked Tanager, Black-and-yellow and Long-tailed Silky-Flycatchers, and Wrenthrush. There is also an impressive diversity of hummingbird here, including Volcano, Fiery-throated, Scintillant, Stripe-tailed, and Talamanca Hummingbirds.

We will bird various elevations in this area and see how the birdlife changes as we climb, even get above treeline at about 11,000ft elevation at Cerro de la Muerte.

Day 8, Mon, Mar 25: Savegre to Carara National Park vicinity. Night: Carara National Park vicinity.

After a final morning in Savegre, we drop in elevation once more to the Pacific lowlands around Carara National Park. We will make a high elevation stop before dropping down at Cerro de la Muerte, where Volcano Junco can be found on the small road to the peak.

It's another fairly long drive, with much of it along the beautiful Pacific Coast. Carara is one of the last strongholds of Scarlet Macaw in Costa Rica, and it hopefully won't take us long to see our first flock even as we are driving along the main road. We will arrive with time for late afternoon birding around the lodge.

Days 9-10, Tue-Wed, Mar 26-27: Carara National Park vicinity Night: Carara National Park vicinity.

The Pacific lowland rainforest here is firm antbird territory and we will search for birds like Black-hooded Antshrike, Slaty and Dot-winged Antwrens, Dusky, Chestnut-backed, and Bicolored Antbirds, Streak-chested Antpitta, and Black-faced Antthrush. Some of them travel in mixed flocks, which are also joined by various woodcreepers, flycatchers, woodpeckers, and manakins. We will be sure to look for the Pacific coast specialty birds, like the spritely Orange-collared Manakin, Fiery-billed Aracari, Riverside Wren, White-crested Coquette, Baird's Trogon, and Yellow-billed Cotinga.

We will also take a boat trip on the Rio Tárcoles one afternoon into coastal mangroves, where we will try to find the endemic Mangrove Hummingbird along with Mangrove Vireo, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, kingfishers, Common Black-Hawk, and a variety of waders. It's possible to see close to 100 species in a few hours on the boat! And we are sure to see many crocodiles.

Day 11, Thu, Mar 28: Carara to San Jose and departure.

We will have a final short morning of birding before eating breakfast and heading back to San José for our departing flights.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Contact information

The Red Hill Birding **tour manager** for this trip is Josh Engel. To sign up, or if you have any questions, please contact Josh at info@redhillbirding.com. To sign up, please fill out the online [booking form](#); once we receive the form, we will be in touch regarding payment of the deposit.

Timing

The trip will **begin on the evening of Monday, March 18, 2024** in San Jose and **will end upon our return to San Jose on Thursday, March 28**. We will provide transportation to our hotel in San Jose on March 18. Please schedule your departure flights on March 28 for after 12:00pm—we will have an approximately 1h15min hour drive to the airport that morning.

Price

The price of the trip is **\$4520 per person** based on sharing a room and the single room supplement is **\$400**. The price of the trip **includes** all meals, from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 11; all ground transportation and accommodations during that period; a Red Hill Birding guide and a local guide for the duration of the trip; tips for the local guides and driver; a boat trip on the Rio Tárcoles; and all entrance fees. It **does not include** airfare to or from San Jose; alcoholic beverages; activities besides what's in the itinerary; snacks; laundry; tip for the Red Hill Birding guide; or other items of a personal nature.

A deposit of \$1200 per person and the submission of the [booking form](#) will secure your place on the trip. Upon receiving your booking form, we will send you deposit details. Final payment is due by December 18, 2023, three months ahead of the trip start date. We accept payment by Zelle, check, and bank transfer. We also accept payment by credit card with an additional 3.1% processing fee.

Accommodations & Food

Accommodations in Costa Rica are generally excellent. While they are not super luxurious, they are generally surrounded by excellent birding, with wonderful food and great hospitality, and are generally just very nice places to stay. All will have en suite bathrooms. Costa Rica does ecotourism right.

Internet will be available in most places we are staying. But take that with a grain of salt; it often does not function as well as you would hope. The guide will have a cell phone where the group can be reached in case of emergency.

Food in Costa Rica is generally delicious and healthy. Rice and beans accompany most meals. Fresh fruit is abundant. Meat, fresh vegetables, salad, and fried bananas are also typical foods.

Physical difficulty

This trip is **physically easy to moderate**. We will be walking quite a bit, possibly several miles in a day, but we will be walking at a "birding pace." Although most places the walking will be easy, there are some areas are hilly and we will be walking on trails that are not flat and can be muddy if it has been raining. We will not be walking great distances on such trails. The lowlands can be quite hot and humid, and rain is possible at any time; in the hot places we will have an afternoon siesta whenever possible and will have plenty of bottled water available. Birding will often be very good right around our accommodations; some might have feeder setups as well. We will be getting as high as 11,000 ft elevation and the highest elevation accommodations will be around 7,500ft.

Pace

The pace of the trip is **moderate**. We will maximize the amount of time we spend in the field with early mornings. At each of the four birding areas, we will have two night stays. Some days will include an afternoon siesta. Our travel days will be broken up by birding stops. We will have

optional nighttime excursions on a couple of evenings to look for owls, nightjars, and nocturnal mammals.

Photography

The photographic opportunities in Costa Rica are **very good**. We will be visiting a few feeder setups that are especially good for photography. The open habitat around the lodges and along roads is also good for photography. Photographing inside the rainforest is difficult due to the typically dark environment. Landscape and cultural photography opportunities are excellent and plentiful. That said, this is primarily a birdwatching tour, so while there will be ample opportunities for photography along the way, we will not be making special considerations for photographers.

Weather

Costa is a tropical country and the weather will generally be warm and humid. It could get cool in the highlands, so a fleece or sweatshirt will be handy for early mornings. Although we will be traveling during the dry season, rain is possible at any time (it is the rainforest, after all), so a raincoat and/or umbrella is important to have along. We will also get plenty of sunshine, so plan accordingly with hat, sunscreen, and other sun protection.

Packing considerations

You will generally want to wear comfortable, light weight clothing that you don't mind getting a little wet or dirty. The dress for the tour is entirely casual. Light weight, quick dry travel clothes are ideal for tropical conditions. Comfortable walking shoes are a must and waterproof hiking shoes would probably be best. Also bring an umbrella and/or raincoat as well as a jacket or sweater for cool mornings. A headlamp or flashlight will be useful for nighttime excursions and in case of power outages. You may want a trekking pole for walking on muddy trails.

At times we could be in buggy environments, so bring repellent and/or repellent clothing. It could also be hot and sunny at times, so sun protection is important. There will be opportunities to have laundry done at the hotels.

As always, the essentials, such as binoculars and medications, should be packed in carry-on bags in case of lost luggage. Electrical outlets are the same as in the US.

Resources

The best bird field guide is *Birds of Costa Rica: A Field Guide* by Richard Garrigues and Robert Dean. The free Merlin Bird ID App has a Costa Rica Bird Pack that is extremely useful. There's also a decent mammal guide, *The Mammals of Costa Rica: A Natural History and Field Guide* by Mark Wainwright and a decent wildlife guide, *The Wildlife of Costa Rica: A Field Guide* by Fiona Reed and co-authors.

Money

The currency in Costa Rica is the colón. Most places that we will be going, US Dollars are accepted. If you would like to get colones, your best bet is to use an ATM (like at the airport) or to change dollars at the airport. American ATM cards (MasterCard and Visa) are accepted at ATMs. Credit cards are also widely accepted in tourist areas.

eBird

Your Red Hill Birding guide and/or local guides will be eBirding the entire tour. If you have an eBird account, they will collect your username/email address in order to share those lists, and will share them when it is convenient. You are welcome to edit your lists to add/remove species, edit text, or change numbers as much as you would like, since any edits you make to your lists do not change others' lists. And we love it when participants add photos and sound recordings to the checklists!

The leader will also provide an eBird Trip Report after the tour and will add participants who have an eBird account to the report; this way, you can see your own personal trip details and those of the whole group. These trip reports are accessible to anyone who has the link, so participants who do not have eBird accounts can still view the report to see the trip list, photos, and any added text.

Tipping

We aim to provide exceptional service, using guides that are knowledgeable, interesting, personable, and experienced. While tipping is never expected, if you feel that your guides went above and beyond, you are welcome to leave them a gratuity. **Note that tips for our local guides and driver are included in the cost of this trip.**

Travel insurance

We do not require travel insurance for trips to Costa Rica. However, we recommend purchasing it to help protect you against the unexpected. For your convenience, we offer travel protection through Travelex Insurance Services. For more information on the available plans or to enroll, go to www.travelexinsurance.com or contact Travelex Insurance Services at 800-228-9792 and reference location number 13-0441.

Travelex Insurance Services, Inc CA Agency License #0D10209. Travel Insurance is underwritten by, Berkshire Hathaway Specialty Insurance Company, NAIC #22276. 55Y

Note that to be eligible for some benefits, travel insurance must be purchased within 1-2 weeks of paying the trip deposit.



Resplendent Quetzal photo by Josh Engel