

Big Five Presents
Costa Rica

Costa Rica's remarkable biodiversity comes wrapped in a rainbow of colors – cloud rainforest dressed in a hundred shades of green; pristine beaches of white, beige and black sand; waterfalls of turquoise and jade; red volcanoes and romantic orange sunsets.

Anyone who loves the outdoors will savor Costa Rica's wealth of national parks and wildlife reserves. This peaceful country remains center stage, the star of Central America. It has no army, and it enjoys one of the highest literacy rates in the world. Travelers can be as active as they choose, experiencing a bird's-eye view on a walk through treetop canopies, or skipping across the waves in an ocean outrigger. There are opportunities for mountain biking, rafting, horseback riding, hiking, bird watching, world-class sports fishing, zip lining canopy tours and rappelling in waterfalls. There is also the chance to spend time with the indigenous Maleku people of the Arenal and northern region, learning about their lives and skills for arts and crafts. The Children's Eternal Rainforest is the largest private reserve in Central America, and has been declared part of the Peace and Water Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO. Costa Rica is just the place to scale an active volcano or reenergize with a luxurious spa treatment. One of the world's best organized countries for nature-based travel, Costa Rica also features a range of delightful inns, hotels, and lodges in exceptional settings, including excellent beach resorts along the Pacific coast. Need another reason to love Costa Rica? Beyond all this glorious nature and adventure, Costa Rica is serious about sustainability. It is striving to reach complete carbon neutrality by 2021 – an ambitious but worthy goal.



Suggested Itinerary

Day 1: San Jose, Costa Rica / Bajos del Toro

Bajos del Toro is a gem that has yet to be discovered by most travelers, but boasts a wealth of natural assets.

Day 2: Bajos del Toro

There are two national parks to explore, cloud forests trail to hike, waterfalls and abundant wildlife to discover.

Day 3: Bajos del Toro / Arenal

Arenal is known for its high wire act...an elaborate system of bridges and footpaths – Arenal Hanging Bridges.

Day 4: Arenal

Made for adventure, Arenal offers canopy tours, rappelling, rafting, caving, lake windsurfing plus natural hot springs.

Day 5: Arenal / Manuel Antonio National Park

On the Pacific Coast, the park has expansive white sand beaches that bump up against an evergreen forest.

Days 6/7: Manuel Antonio National Park

The park has been ranked among the world's 12 most beautiful national parks.

Day 8: Manuel Antonio / San Jose / Depart

Custom Options

Guanacaste (4-5 days)

From beaches to volcanoes, the area is rich in outdoor activities such as horseback riding, surfing and fishing.

Monteverde Cloud Forest (3 days)

This primeval world is a cornucopia of extraordinary biological treasures – both flora and fauna.

Osa Peninsula (4-5 days)

A stronghold of primary forest in the Americas, this park is one of the most eco-diverse regions on earth.

South Caribbean Coast (3-4 days)

Miles of Caribbean shoreline translates to excellent scuba diving and superb sport fishing.

Tortuguero National Park (2-3 days)

From high rainforest to marsh communities, this is one of Costa Rica's most popular parks.

Turrialba Volcano National Park (3-4 days):

Adventure options at this hidden gem include horseback riding, hiking, mountain biking and whitewater rafting.

Uvita & Dominical (4 days)

A short distance from the more popular Manuel Antonio, this area offers rainforest, surfing and a great base to explore Corcovado National Park.

About Costa Rica

Arenal: The rainforest is accessible through an elaborate system of eight fixed and six hanging bridges and footpaths known as the Arenal Hanging Bridges. This adventure in the treetops features more than three kilometers / two miles of hiking trails through spectacular lowland rainforest. Rappelling, rafting, caving, lake windsurfing and relaxing in natural hot springs are all on the menu.

Bajos del Toro: In a valley in the central highlands, Bajos del Toro is largely unknown. It is unrivaled in its cloud forest setting surrounded by lush vegetation and waterfalls. Nearby Poas Volcano National Park covers about 65 kilometers / 6,000 acres near the Pacific coast. The main crater is 290 meters / 950 feet deep and is active with small geyser and eruptions. Also nearby is the lesser explored Juan Castro Blanco National Park has an extensive but rugged trail system. The park shelters turkey, peacock, falcon, monkey, coyote and armadillo.

Guanacaste: From the northern area of Papagayo down to Montezuma on the Nicoya Peninsula, the area is rich in outdoor activities. Stunning shoreline and great bird watching combine with horseback riding, surfing and snorkeling to make this just the right combination of sports and relaxation. The eastern border of Guanacaste is a chain of volcanoes that stretch out to join the Cordillera de Guanacaste and Cordillera de Tilaran mountain ranges. Excellent trails take hikers to the summit of volcanoes.

Manuel Antonio National Park: With an area of just 16 square kilometers / 4,014 acres, it is the smallest of Costa Rica's national parks, yet as many as 150,000 travelers a year come to its beautiful beaches and forest hiking trails. Forest, mangrove swamps, lagoons and beach habitats shelter 109 species of mammals and 184 types of birds. Twelve small isles off the coast see dolphins and migrating whales. Quiet Quepos spreads across a tropical inlet surrounded by primary rainforest. The small town center has restaurants, galleries and shops.

Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve: The cloud forest is perpetually nurtured by mists from the coast that nourishes majestic trees, wild orchids, bromeliads and a wealth of ferns, vines and mosses. The primeval world of this old-growth cloud forest is filled with birds such as the three wattled bellbird and elusive resplendent Quetzal. It is home to jaguar, ocelot and Baird's tapir. Its treetop Sky Trek provides exciting bird's eye views of the jungle canopy.

Osa Peninsula: There are no roads to the remote northern part of Corcovado National Park, a pristine primary forest that supports scarlet macaws, anteaters, monkeys, and tiny frogs inhabit this terrain. Many consider this the crown jewel in Costa Rica's extensive system of national parks and biological reserves. Indeed, the peninsula is home to at least half of all species living in Costa Rica. Optional fishing or horseback excursions are available.

San Jose: Costa Rica's capital city is modern and energetic with a bustling economy and a welcoming attitude. Founded in 1738, San Jose became the capital in 1823, and its university was established in 1843. The city retains hints of elegant, old-world character. Both the national theater and Melico Salazar Theatre maintain busy slates of productions in season. The Gold Museum has an unusual collection of gold artifacts. Nearby, is the tranquil La Paz Waterfalls with hummingbird and butterfly gardens.



South Caribbean Coast: Wild and beautiful with pounding surf, gorgeous white sand beaches and prehistoric rainforests, Costa Rica's Caribbean Coast is ideal for nature lovers. Inland rainforests reach all the way down to touch the coastline. Christopher Columbus landed along here in 1502. The country's 201 kilometers / 125 miles of shoreline lies within Limon province. Yet, this province is one of the country's least traveled areas. It has outstanding diving and snorkeling locations and superb sport fishing. Cahuita National Park is also home to some of the last indigenous Indian communities of Costa Rica.

Tortuguero National Park: Encompassing 11 different habitats from rainforest to marsh, it protects a fabulous array of wildlife, including more than 375 bird species, 57 species of amphibians and 111 varieties of reptiles, including three types of marine turtles, and 60 mammal species. Here, 13 of Costa Rica's 16 endangered animals are found, including jaguars, tapirs, ocelots, cougars and manatees. This is also an important sea turtle nesting site from June to October. It is the third-most visited park in Costa Rica, even though it is only reachable by air or boat.

Turrialba Volcano National Park: This area is a great option for travelers who want to explore more off-the-beaten-path areas. Hiking up the volcano is a popular option. Others adventures range from horseback riding, to mountain biking, to whitewater rafting. The volcano is still active, but the last major eruptions were in mid-1800s.

Uvita & Dominical: Just south of the more popular Manuel Antonio, this area is less sophisticated than other Costa Rica locales, but with a spectacular rainforest. It is a great base for exploring Corcovado National Park. Dominical and Uvita are beach-front towns known for surfing. Both are growing but still retain that small casual attitude. Rock climbing, zip lining, parasailing and boating are possible.

Best Time To Go

High season for Costa Rica tourism is from late November until April, the dry season; especially so around Christmas and spring break / Easter week. The rainy season runs from May through the middle of November. Most of Costa Rica receives rain at nearly the same time on most days.

\$300 - \$550 per person per day
Land only, double occupancy

Consider enhancing your adventure by including the following destinations: Belize (p95-98), Panama (p123-126)



