

Trip Dossier for Costa Rica - Rainforest & Volcanoes

Trip Code: FCRA Issue date: 16 Sept 2009 Valid from: 01 Jan 2010

Costa Rica is just made for families. It offers a wonderful combination of adventure and activity as well as superb beaches and comfortable accommodation. On this itinerary you'll dip your toes in both Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, experience the contrast between the laid back Caribbean coast and the ranches and cowboy country of Guanacaste in the west, and enjoy a dazzling array of activities in the rainforest – canopy tours, zip-wire riding, rafting, inner tubing and horse-riding. High mountains, dense primary rainforest, wildlife and empty beaches are just a few of the highlights of this compact and peaceful Latin American republic. The phrase you'll hear most in Costa Rica is 'Pura Vida' – it's a good life!

Day 1 Arrive in San José

On arrival in San José you'll be met and transferred to your hotel. The beautifully sculpted hotel cascades down the hill (Alto de Las Palomas) providing exquisite views of San Jose and the surrounding volcanoes and valley. The carved look melds different styles --- Spanish-Moorish medieval, countryside *elegant* --- into one graceful structure. The vaulted ceilings in the Paseo and wide stone stairway lead castle-like from the reclusive guest rooms to La Luz Restaurant. It is set in a quiet residential and commercial district, just 10 minutes from the centre of San José. The hotel has an attractive swimming pool and is ideal for families. Rooms all have air conditioning and private bathrooms. San José is your base for the first two nights to get an introduction to Costa Rica and relax after your long flight. **Hotel 2 nights, with swimming pool (breakfast)**

Day 2 In San Jose. Visit Poas Volcano National Park and INBio Park.

After breakfast, if it's clear you should have your first views of the forest clad mountains and volcanoes that surround the capital. You will head towards the Poás Volcano, located within the Poás Volcano National Park. It is considered the largest active crater in the world, about 1 mile (1.6 km.) wide and 320 meters deep, with frequent geyser-like eruptions. Near the volcano's active crater, there are lakes of molten sulfur, thought to be the only examples of their kind in the world. Lake Botos fills an extinct crater and is home to many cloud forest birds like hummingbirds, tanagers, flycatchers, toucanets, Clay-colored Robin and the Resplendent Quetzal. Due to the high acidity of the lake there is little to no marine life in the lake.

In the afternoon you'll visit the National Institute of Biodiversity (Instituto Nacional de Biodiversidad - INBio) just outside the city, which provides a good introduction to the wildlife of Costa Rica. Here you can walk through different kinds of forest and observe many birds, sloths, iguanas... Around the lagoon you can visit a butterfly nursery that houses more than fifteen different species of butterfly. You'll also be able to see poisonous frogs, bullet ants, various snake species, tarantulas, alligators, turtles and orchids. "La Finca" is an exhibition especially created with the purpose to illustrate how well man has coexisted with biodiversity and made sustainable use of it. You can also plant seeds in the garden, learn about medicinal plants, extract juice from sugar cane, comb a goat or feed some of the farm animals.

Day 3 Drive to Tortuguero National Park (4 hours approx.)

Today the adventure really begins. After an early breakfast you'll be driven out of San José and find yourself in rainforest almost immediately as you head into the thickly forested mountains of the Braulio Carrillo National Park. The park consists of more than 300 square kilometres of original or primary rainforest and provides a picture of how this central region of Costa Rica must have looked a century or so ago before many tracts of forest were felled. It is nothing less than beautiful. Later, near Siquirres, the scenery and atmosphere changes once again as you pass, and perhaps stop to explore, large banana plantations. At Caño Blanco (meaning white port) you'll board a boat to journey (2 hours) into the lush wetland area of Tortuguero National Park. Within minutes you'll have left all roads behind and entered the peaceful canals of this lush wetland area. During the journey to your lodge you'll catch your first glimpses of the great diversity of flora and fauna found here, including sloths, monkeys, toucans, crocodiles and green turtles. Your lodge is set in the rainforest within extensive tropical gardens, in the centre of which is a huge *almendro* tree, home to *oropéndola* birds. The rooms are all in bungalows with two double beds in each room. There is a pleasant swimming pool area too. Once you've settled in, we'll include an afternoon visit to the Green Turtle Information Centre in Tortuguero Village (entry fee US\$1 payable locally), which describes (in words, pictures and film), the fascinating story of the migration routes of these ancient creatures that have outlived even the dinosaurs. **Lodge bungalow 2 nights, with swimming pool (breakfast, lunch & dinner)**

Day 4 Tortuguero National Park

Today you set off before breakfast for some further exploration of Tortuguero's canals. 309 bird species reside within the National Park's rainforest and swamp forest and there are many monkeys here too. You may also see the fishing bulldog bat, keelbilled toucans, anurans, seven species of tortoise, manatees, crocodiles and even the gar (considered a living fossil) which have their home here. You'll return to the lodge with a healthy appetite and enjoy breakfast before some free time to enjoy the tropical garden or take a dip in the pool. Your time here is left free to really take in the atmosphere. There



is an opportunity to explore the forest on foot with a guide this afternoon. In the evening (July to October only) it is possible to arrange an evening turtle watching tour (optional) at the beach.

Day 5 Travel to Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí

After breakfast you will travel by boat back to Caño Blanco docks to meet your vehicle. From here you'll take the road to Guapiles (driving time approx 3 hours) before turning off into Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí – one of Costa Rica's most famous rainforest areas and perfect for families wanting to explore and enjoy activities in the forest. Your accommodation here is typical of the area, offering an authentic rainforest experience and a variety of activities and interests, both within the grounds of the lodge as well as nearby, in the rainforest itself. Rafting, canopy tours, inner-tubing and riding can all be arranged (extra). The lodge also has its own rainforest trails, a swimming pool and a restaurant.

Lodge bungalows 2 nights, with swimming pool (breakfast)

Day 6 Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí - Chocolate tour

We recommend an early start this morning so that you can watch toucans, many colourful birds and perhaps a red poison frog that all live in this dense vegetation. Afterwards you will learn everything about chocolate, from its origins in the ancient Aztec and Mayan cultures, to its importance in the economy of modern day Central America. The tour starts with a guided walk over Tirimbina's hanging bridge and then you learn all about cacao. In a warm and humid climate, the small, native cacao tree produces fruit all year round. The fruit is a huge melon-shaped berry, called a pod. When ripe, the reddish-purple pods turn brown, and when split open to reveal 20 to 40 almond-shaped cacao beans, which are fermented to reduce their bitterness and develop their aroma. Once dry, the beans are cleaned, roasted and shelled to obtain the kernels, which are ground between large heated rollers in high-speed mills to produce a thick, dark-brown paste called chocolate liquor, from which all chocolate is made. Pure chocolate liquor, which contains 53 to 55 percent cocoa butter, is unsweetened and too bitter to eat. This is compressed into blocks or squares and is used for cooking and baking. Everybody knows the taste of chocolate, but few people get this fascinating insight into its origins. And there is some sampling to be done too! A typical lunch is also included today.

Back at the Lodge you can enjoy the gardens and swimming pool or take a self-guided tour and see the butterfly gardens and try and identify all the frogs – the poison dart frog and the green frog are just a couple of the more exotic ones.

Day 7 Visit Arenal volcano

Today you'll head to La Fortuna, in the lee of Arenal volcano (around 2½ hours drive). This small but busy town is set below the famous Arenal Volcano. This 1633 metre high volcano is said to be one of the world's most active volcanoes - small-scale eruptions take place on an almost continuous basis around the clock. However it's only at night that the activity becomes really apparent - if it's clear you can see lava flows glowing incandescent like a firework display. Unfortunately the summit is often shrouded in cloud, so you may not be able to see much, but you still know you're near a volcano because of the subterranean rumblings and splutters. There is a chance to go hiking in the park in the afternoon. Your hotel, set in a quiet location just outside La Fortuna, is surrounded by gardens in a very peaceful environment. Breakfast is taken in an open air 'ranch house' and the guest rooms have views from private terraces of the Arenal volcano –There is also a swimming pool area within the hotel grounds. **Hotel 1 night, with swimming pool (breakfast)**

Day 8 Culture Tour. Travel along the shore of Laguna de Arenal; drive to Guanacaste (4 hours)

This tour begins early in the morning when we leave La Fortuna town, during the tour we will learn about the relationship and interaction of the inhabitants with the Arenal Volcano, its effects on land prices, the traditional way of living, agriculture, cattle breeding and its history, the living fences, and much more. Once at La Casona we will make a visit to the Trapiche, then a "tractor" trip to Sonafuca town, here at the local rural grocery store the participants can buy soft drinks or snacks, if they wish so, and interact with the owner and local clients. At Sonafuca's Primary School, the children will present us a selection of local folk dances and information about the educational system in Costa Rica.

Later you'll follow the shoreline along the north of the Laguna de Arenal, the largest man-made lake in Costa Rica - the dam was built in 1973 to provide hydro-electricity for the region and this project now produces 70% of Costa Rica's electricity. Your journey is along slower roads today, taking you over the Cordillera de Tilarán, a major farming zone for coffee, peanuts and macadamia nuts, as well as a centre for cattle and horse ranching. Continuing to Cañas you reach the Guanacaste lowlands known as *sabana* and often referred to as cowboy country due to the cattle-raising farms found in this area. Cañas is a small town with a unique charm, known for its folk dancing and ranches. We may break our journey at 'Rincón Corobicí', where you can usually see and hear the eerie sounds of howler monkeys! The journey continues through more spectacular and diverse scenery and landscapes as you travel past the chain of volcanoes which runs along the eastern border of the Guanacaste district and through lush dense forests – home to exotic plants and animals. Many endangered animals and birds live here, including jaguars and tapirs. Finally we reach our destination in the Rincón de la Vieja mountains - one of the last remaining tropical dry forests in Central America, and home to one of Costa Rica's most active volcanoes. **Lodge 2 nights, with swimming pool (breakfast & lunch)**

Day 9 Rincón de la Vieja National Park

The Rincón de la Vieja, which means 'old lady's corner', is named after the legend of an old witch living on the eastern slopes of the volcano, who sent smoke into the sky when she was angry. The volcano is over a million years old and



although it has not erupted since 1983, it is active and last spewed ash and lava down its sides in 1991. The National Park offers stunning landscapes, beautiful waterfalls, giant trees, hot springs, mud pits and a volcanic lagoon – there is plenty to see and explore during the day here. As well as walks in the park itself, you can also choose one of the various optional activities available such rafting, canopy tour, rock climbing or horse riding. Alternatively, if you want to try something different, you can slap mud all over your body and then simmer slowly in a natural hot-spring. Or you can just chill out by the pool. **(breakfast)**

Days 10 & 11 Drive to Ocotal on the Pacific Ocean

This morning you'll leave the Rincón de la Vieja and drive to the Pacific coast at Ocotal (1 ½ hours). This is a particularly good place to relax and unwind, and a great destination for snorkelling and diving. You can do as much or as little as you wish over the next couple of days and there are a wide range of activities to keep you occupied if you desire. Do not hesitate to let us know (in advance please) if you would like to extend your time here! **Hotel 2 nights, with swimming pool (breakfast)**

Day 12 Return to San José airport for flight home

Today you will be driven back along the Pan American Highway to San José (journey time approx 4-5 hours). You stop in the town of Grecia surrounded by sugar and coffee plantations, it is said to be the cleanest town in Costa Rica. You can visit the only metal church in central America. Onwards to Sarchi, known as the cradle of Costa Rican Artisans because of its fine workshops. Here you can watch some local craftsmen at work, and you have the chance to buy souvenirs if you wish to. You are advised to arrive at the airport at least 3 hours prior to departure. Please also note that departure tax is not included in the tour price as this must be paid locally. Please allow US\$26 (approx £16) in cash for this (paid at the airport). Overnight flight to London.

Day 13 Arrive London

Your flight arrives in London

This itinerary includes our group flights from London. If you are making other flight arrangements, please refer to your Confirmation Invoice and Joining Instructions for details of the start or end of the trip. Please remember international flights and trip dates do occasionally change, so please always purchase flexible tickets.

Each itinerary is planned many months in advance and although it is our intention to operate the itinerary as printed in the brochure and detailed here, it may be necessary to make some changes as a result of alterations to flight schedules, climatic conditions, limitations of infrastructure or other operational factors which are beyond our control. As a consequence, the order or location of overnight stops may vary from those outlined but we will always endeavour to keep you informed of any such changes. Included meals are indicated in the daily itinerary.

Optional Extras

These excursions, if available, can be arranged through your tour leader (approx. per person cost shown below)

Sarapiquí/Arenal – Horse-riding	£20.00
Sarapiquí/Arenal – Rafting	£35.00
Sarapiquí/Arenal – Inner tubing	£10.00
Sarapiquí – Bat Tour	£11.00
Sarapiquí – Night Walk	£11.00
La Fortuna – Zip-wire canopy tour	£40.00
Ocotal – Sailing and snorkelling trip	£40.00
Ocotal – Jet Ski	£80.00

Is this right for your family? All children learn about the rainforest in school these days - this trip gives them an opportunity to experience it first hand and learn about its diverse flora and fauna. Travel in Costa Rica is easy as the distances are relatively short, while the lodges are comfortable and full of character.

Lone Parents Single parents or other adults travelling alone with children should be aware that some countries, including the UK, require documentation confirming that the individual has authority to travel with the minor. It is crucial that you contact the relevant country embassy for further information on exactly what may be required. These details can be found on the Foreign & Commonwealth Website under the appropriate country www.fco.gov.uk/travel

Climate The dry season is between December and April. Although the rainy season, locally called the “Green Season”, runs from May to mid-November, July and August can be very pleasant, with sun in the morning and afternoon rain. It does not usually rain continuously all day during the rain season. The wettest time is between September and mid-November. There is little variation in temperature throughout the year – with any change mainly depending on altitude. In most of the country it is pleasantly warm year round (sometimes hot and sticky), but it can get surprisingly cool if you're high up in the mountains.

The average monthly climate in San Jose:



	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Max °C	24	24	26	26	27	26	25	26	26	25	25	24
Min °C	14	14	15	17	17	17	17	16	16	16	16	14
Rainfall (mm)	15	5	20	46	229	241	211	241	305	300	145	41

Accommodation The hotels and lodges are generally very good - at least 3 star standard. All hotels have private facilities and are on a twin share basis - most of them are air-conditioned. Many have swimming pools. All hotels are modern, clean comfortable and offer a friendly service. The mention of a swimming pool at a hotel should not be taken as a guarantee but rather an indication. You should also be aware that swimming pools at the hotels are often unheated and so can be cold in the winter months or even closed.

Food and Drink Meals included as per itinerary. Please remember to drink plenty of bottled water during your trip. Food in Costa Rica is good and wholesome, although you will have to get used to the ubiquitous rice and beans which are served with just about every meal (including breakfast!). There's plenty of excellent fresh fish available (especially close to both coasts) and chicken is generally very good. Salads, vegetables and fresh fruit are plentiful.

Local Costs

A small bottle of mineral water (500ml)	£0.60
A large bottle of mineral water (1 litre)	£0.80
A can of coke (soft drinks)	£0.60
A carton or bottle of fruit juice	£0.80
A bottle of beer	£1.20
A light lunch time snack – sandwich for example	£2.00
A two course meal* - excluding drinks	£6.00
A three course meal* - excluding drinks	£8.00

*Based on a mid range tourist restaurant.

Currency The unit of currency is Costa Rican Colón (CRC). At the time of writing UK£1 = CRC955 and US\$1 = CRC 588 (Sep 2009). However US dollars are widely accepted and have come to be regarded as the country's second currency. US dollar Travellers' Cheques and credit cards are readily accepted in banks, hotels and some souvenir shops. We recommend that you change money at the airport.

Tippling is a recognised part of life and although at your discretion you will be expected to reward service. It should be remembered, however, that over-generosity could lead to jealousy in poor countries. Please remember that all tips should be a way for individuals to thank staff for good service.

Please also remember that your tour leader works hard and for long hours to make your holiday run smoothly, a suitable reward for good service would be £1-£2 from each person, per day. It is usual to collect this between yourselves as a group and present it to the leader on completion of the tour.

Security Whilst the vast majority of travellers never experience anything untoward it is worth taking precautions particularly in urban areas. You should take sensible precautions in crowded areas such as street markets and airports, where pick-pocketing is common, and keep clear of any street disturbances. Don't wear expensive jewellery, never leave your bags unattended, keep large amounts of money, cameras and mobile phones out of sight when walking in town centres, and avoid walking in city centres after dark. Keep copies of important documents, including passports, in a separate place to the documents themselves, together with details of credit cards. Leave copies at home with a friend too. Safeguard valuables, important documents and cash and deposit them in hotel safes, where practicable.

Language The official language in Costa Rica is Spanish, although English is widely spoken in tourist areas.

Time Costa Rica is GMT -6 hours

Passports and visas

British nationals do not require a visa to enter Costa Rica and can stay as visitors for up to three months. Passports should have a validity of more than six months from the date of entry. If you are travelling via the U.S. please see the separate US Visa Waiver information sheet.

Departure tax: US\$26 per person is payable on leaving the country.



Clothing & Equipment List for Rainforest & Volcanoes

In general pack light-weight, loose fitting and comfortable clothing plus some warmer windproof items for cooler mornings/evenings at altitude. Light-weight cotton clothing is recommended in this climate with a wrap or sweater for the cooler evenings.

CLOTHING	NUMBER PER PERSON	Check	EQUIPMENT	Check
Walking Shoes	1 pair		Kitbag/Rucksack 50 – 80litres	
Trainers or Strong Sandals	1 pair – all purpose wear		Lightweight Daypack – 25 litres	
Socks	4 +		A variety of plastic bags	
Waterproof Jacket	1 lightweight		Sunglasses	
T-Shirts	3 +		Personal First Aid Kit	
Long Trousers or Skirt	2 +			
Short Trousers	2		Insect Repellent with high DEET content	
Long Sleeve Shirt	2 +		Torch and Batteries	
Track Suit Bottoms or Similar	Optional		Camera, Film and Accessories	
Sunhat / Baseball cap	Essential (styled to shade face, ears and neck)		Towel or Sarong	
Warm jacket	1			
Thin Fleece or Sweatshirt	1			
Warm hat, scarf and gloves	Woolly or fleece (Nov-Feb)			
Swim Wear	1			

ITEM	Check	ITEM	Check
Passport/ Visa			
Air Tickets		Universal travelling adapter	
Money/Travellers Cheques		Binoculars - essential	
Cash Cards/Visa		Sunscreen – lots of it	
Insurance Documents		Pocket/folding umbrella	
Trip Information and Itinerary			
Money Security Belt/Pouch			

For details regarding **hand luggage restrictions** please visit www.baa.com