

# BEST OF COSTA RICA

With Tom Hissong, Tour Leader  
&

Leonardo Garrigues, Birding Guide

March 3 – 15, 2020

**\$3695**

**13 Days / 12 Nights**

**Single Supplement: \$540**

**\$300 Small group surcharge  
for groups smaller than 8**



Costa Rica has been a favorite spot for nature lovers and birders for decades, and for good reason. About 25% of the country is made up of protected national parks and rain forests which hold 5% of the world's diversity. Over 900 species of birds have been recorded there, and you are likely to encounter other wildlife as you search the forests for avian life. Sloths, Coatis, at least 3 different species of monkeys and several species of lizard are but a small portion of the myriad of species that inhabit this naturalist's paradise. You can expect comfortable lodging and good food while exploring one of the best birding locations in Central America.

## DETAILED ITINERARY

### Day 1, Tuesday, March 3

Arrive in Costa Rica and transfer to the Hotel Robledal for a welcome dinner and overnight.

**Hotel Robledal (D)**

## **Day 2, Wednesday, March 4**

An early morning bird walk around the hotel grounds will acquaint us with some of the more common and widespread species in Costa Rica, such as Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Great Kiskadee, Clay-colored Thrush, Great-tailed Grackle, and Blue-gray Tanager. We'll also expect to see others, possibly including Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Hoffmann's Woodpecker, Crimson-fronted Parakeet, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, and Grayish Saltator.

After breakfast, we travel to the Central Pacific coastal region and Carara National Park. Here the southern Pacific wet forest habitat reaches its northern limit and we'll be looking for various species endemic to this part of Costa Rica and adjacent western Panama. Among these are Charming Hummingbird, Baird's Trogon, Fiery-billed Aracari, Golden-naped Woodpecker, Chiriqui Foliage-Gleaner, Riverside Wren, and Spot-crowned Euphonia. Of course, we'll also keep an eye and ear open for the gaudy and raucous Scarlet Macaw!



In the afternoon, we'll take a boat ride on the Tarcoles River where, in addition to a good number of waders and shorebirds and up to five species of kingfishers, we'll be hoping to see several mangrove habitat specialists: Northern Scrub-Flycatcher, Panama Flycatcher, Mangrove Vireo, the distinctive mangrove race of Yellow Warbler, and the endemic Mangrove Hummingbird.

Black-and-white Owl and Pacific Screech-Owl are distinct possibilities around the lodge in the evening.

**Cerro Lodge (BLD)**

## **Day 3, Thursday, March 5**

We'll have a second morning in the Carara area to look for things that may have eluded us thus far. The open understory in many parts of the park make it that much easier to spot ground-dwelling species like Great Tinamou, Marbled Wood-Quail, Gray-chested Dove, Ruddy Quail-Dove, Scaly-throated Leaf-tosser, Streak-chested Antpitta, and Black-faced Antthrush. An eye to the sky might spy a passing group of Costa Rican Swifts or perhaps a soaring King Vulture or Double-toothed Kite. And a good mid-level insectivore flock could harbor White-whiskered Puffbird, Dot-winged Antwren, Tawny-winged Woodcreeper, Plain Xenops, Greenish Elaenia, White-winged Becard, Rufous-breasted Wren, and Long-billed Gnatwren, among others.

Eventually, we'll have to tear ourselves away from the incredible birding that Carara typically provides and move on to our next destination: Monteverde. Though, perhaps the lure of cooler temperatures up in the hills might help persuade some to leave the hot and humid lowlands.

**Hotel de Montaña Monteverde (BLD)**

## **Day 4, Friday, March 6**

Pre-breakfast birding around the hotel will introduce us to new species that might include Gray-headed Chachalaca, Lesser Violetear, Magenta-throated Woodstar, Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Golden-olive Woodpecker, Brown-hooded Parrot, and White-eared Ground-Sparrow.

Due to a sharp decline in moisture from the top of the ridge down through the level of the community and below, there are four different life zones crowded into a short straight-line distance on the Pacific side of the ridge. With two and a half days to explore the area, we'll have time to cover all of them fairly thoroughly, though the exact order will depend on several factors and will ultimately be the guide's call.

In the lower, drier areas where little moss or other epiphytic vegetation grows on the trees' trunks and branches, we'll search for species such as Chiriqui Quail-Dove, Olivaceous and Ruddy Woodcreepers, Long-tailed Manakin, Rufous-and-white Wren, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, White-naped Brushfinch, and Golden-crowned Warbler. We'll also be especially attentive to any loud "bonking" noises that will signal the whereabouts of the amazing Three-wattled Bellbird and their display perches. As we work our way upwards in elevation, the lushness of the forests will increase with each new increment. New bird species will also begin to appear and could include Ruddy Pigeon, Prong-billed Barbet, Gray-throated Leaf-tosser, White-throated Spadebill, Azure-hooded Jay, Gray-breasted Wood-Wren, Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush, Elegant Euphonia, and Slate-throated Redstart. Without a doubt, however, we'll be anxiously awaiting our first views of the Resplendent Quetzal—arguably one of the most beautiful birds in the world!

**Hotel de Montaña Monteverde (BLD)**



### **Day 5, Saturday, March 7**

A second full-day in the Monteverde area will offer us more opportunities to discover the fascinating birdlife associated with this region, including numerous highland species endemic to the mountains of Costa Rica and adjacent western Panama. Among the possibilities are Black Guan, Yellow-thighed Finch, Black-breasted Wood-Quail, Buff-fronted Quail-Dove, Purple-throated Mountain-gem, Orange-bellied Trogon, Silvery-fronted Tapaculo, Streak-breasted Treehunter, Ruddy Treerunner, Golden-bellied Flycatcher, Ochraceous Wren, Black-faced Solitaire, Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Wrenthrush, Costa Rican Warbler, Collared Redstart, and Spangle-cheeked Tanager. And then there's the tiny Coppery-headed Emerald, a hummingbird whose entire range is restricted to middle-elevation forest in northern and central Costa Rica.

**Hotel de Montaña Monteverde (BLD)**



*Yellow-thighed Finch*

### **Day 6, Sunday, March 8**

We'll have a final morning in the Monteverde area before dropping back down to the lowlands. By afternoon we'll be in dry forest habitat and heading to the Gulf of Nicoya, where we'll spend two nights at a working cattle ranch that has realized the advantages of ecotourism and protecting what forested habitat remains.

#### **La Ensenada Lodge (BLD)**

### **Day 7, Monday, March 9**

We'll awake to a commanding view of the gulf with soaring Magnificent Frigatebirds and Brown Pelicans, but we'll also be watching our surroundings for such creatures as Crested Bobwhite, Common Ground-Dove, Green-breasted Mango, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Black-headed Trogon, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Yellow-naped Parrot, White-throated Magpie-Jay, and Olive Sparrow. After breakfast, we'll embark on a day-trip to another cattle ranch that is a popular birding destination: Hacienda Solimar. An extensive wetlands system in the area provides adequate habitat for most of Costa Rica's small population of Jabiru—the New World's largest stork. We may also see the odd Double-striped Thick-knee, a skulking Lesser Ground-Cuckoo, or perhaps a roosting Spectacled Owl. More chances will also be had for dry forest birds like Orange-fronted Parakeet, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Rose-throated Becard, Banded Wren, White-lored Gnatcatcher, Scrub Euphonia, Stripe-headed Sparrow, and Streak-backed and Spot-breasted Orioles. And the open habitat makes for good raptor-viewing potential with more than a dozen possible species.

#### **La Ensenada Lodge (BLD)**

### **Day 8, Tuesday, March 10**

After breakfast, we'll leave the hot, dry lowlands and journey to the Caribbean side of Costa Rica. We'll hardly have passed the Continental Divide at Bijagua de Upala when we make a birding stop at Las Heliconias Hanging Bridges. The look and feel of the forest will be totally different from what we've just left behind and seemingly endless new bird species will be awaiting. If we have the fortune to cross paths with a marauding swarm of army ants, we might well spend many minutes watching the action as numerous bird species work the advancing front, picking off invertebrates frantically fleeing the ants. A well-attended ant swarm in this part of the country could have as many of four species of antbirds (Zeledon's, Bicolored, Spotted, and Ocellated), numerous woodcreepers, wrens, and even a surprise or two such as Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo or Tody Motmot. Even without an ant swarm, there will undoubtedly be much to see in this new environment. Simply by virtue of being on the Caribbean slope we will now be in the range of Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Cinnamon Woodpecker, Band-backed Wren, Olive-backed Euphonia, Black-cowled Oriole, Black-faced Grosbeak, and Rufous-winged Tanager, to name a few.

#### **Celeste Mountain Lodge (BLD)**



*Bay-headed Tanager*

### **Day 9, Wednesday, March 11**

An early morning walk on the lodge's trail might yield regional endemics such as Purplish-backed Quail-Dove, Lattice-tailed Trogon, Yellow-eared Toucanet, Streak-crowned Antvireo, or Stripe-breasted Wren. Along the forest edge, a good mixed tanager flock could have our heads spinning as we try to get on such colorful creatures as Crimson-collared, Scarlet-rumped, Golden-hooded, Bay-headed, and Silver-throated Tanagers, along with Shining, Red-legged, and Green Honeycreepers, and Scarlet-thighed Dacnis. And after all that color, we might just give our eyes a rest and listen to the amazing song of a Nightingale Wren or the gurgling calls coming from a colony of Chestnut-headed or Montezuma Oropendolas.

After lunch, we'll continue on to our final field destination: Arenal Volcano. Although the fireworks of a decade ago have subsided, the nearly perfectly conical shape rising out of the ground is nothing short of mesmerizing. Well, on a clear day that is. Even if clouds spoil the show, the birds will certainly continue to entertain us.

### **Arenal Observatory Lodge (BLD)**

#### **Day 10, Thursday, March 12**

By now, we'll be seeing quite a number of "old friends", though there are always new acquaintances to be made. If we haven't already seen Crested Guan and Great Curassow, we should by the time we're done at Arenal!



*Barred Antshrike*

Antshrikes, Slaty Spinetail, Long-tailed Tyrant, Black-throated Wren, Tropical Mockingbird, Gray-crowned and Olive-crowned Yellowthroats, and Black-headed Saltator.

### **Arenal Observatory Lodge (BLD)**

#### **Day 11, Friday, March 13**

Following a final morning at Arenal, we'll travel back to the Central Valley, stopping en route at a mid-elevation site for perhaps a few more species that we may not as yet have seen such as Green Thorntail, White-bellied Mountain-gem, Black-bellied Hummingbird, Barred Becard, or Sooty-faced Finch.

### **Hotel Robledal (BLD)**

#### **Day 11, Saturday, March 14**

We'll do a day-trip to Irazu Volcano National Park to search for highland species whose elevational ranges keep them above where we've been so far. (At 11,000 feet above sea level, Irazu is twice as high as Monteverde—so

Although there are no hummingbird feeders on the property, the variety of flowers in the sprawling gardens are known to have attracted more than 20 species of hummers over the years. Possibilities include White-necked Jacobin, Green Hermit, Brown Violetear, Purple-crowned Fairy, Black-crested Coquette, Violet-headed Hummingbird, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird, Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer, Crowned Woodnymph, and Blue-throated Goldentail.

Based on what we have and have not seen up until now, our guide will decide where to best spend our remaining time. A walk on forest trails might turn up Black-throated Trogon, Rufous Motmot, White-fronted Nunbird, Russet Antshrike, Dull-mantled Antbird, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, White-ruffed Manakin, Tawny-crowned Greenlet, Tawny-capped Euphonia, Black-and-yellow Tanager, or Carmiol's Tanager, among others. Birding more open habitats might produce Pale-vented Pigeon, White-throated Crake, Southern Lapwing, Gray Hawk, Gartered Trogon, Laughing Falcon, Great and Barred

bring along a couple of layers to keep warm!) One target will be the elusive Buffy-crowned Wood-Partridge. We should also be able to see representatives of a local resident race of Mourning Dove. Three species of range-restricted hummingbirds can also be expected: Talamanca Hummingbird (formerly Magnificent Hummingbird), Fiery-throated Hummingbird, and Volcano Hummingbird. The aptly-named Volcano Junco will be another species we'll hope to see at the higher elevations, along with Black-capped Flycatcher, Yellow-winged Vireo, Timberline Wren, Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Sooty Thrush, Black-and-yellow and Long-tailed Silky-flycatchers, Sooty-capped Chlorospingus, Large-footed Finch, Flame-throated and Black-cheeked Warblers, and Slaty Flowerpiercer—all species found only in the highlands of Costa Rica and adjacent western Panama. And we could also have parting views of Resplendent Quetzals!

### **Hotel Robledal (BLD)**

### **Day 11, Sunday, March 15**

Transfer to the airport for departing flights.

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### **Price includes:**

- ~ Lodging
- ~ All meals as indicated
- ~ Airport transfers
- ~ All land transportation within Costa Rica
- ~ Mangrove Boat Tour on the Tarcoles Rover
- ~ Entrance fees to all parks and reserves
- ~ Expert local bilingual naturalist guide (Leonardo Garrigues)

### **Price does NOT include:**

- ~ International airfare
- ~ Trip insurance
- ~ Expenses of a personal nature such as laundry, phone calls, extra drinks and snacks, souvenirs, etc.
- ~ Gratuities

### **Terms and Conditions:**

Deposit of \$750 with registration form

Payment in full is due 4 months prior to start date (November 3, 2019)

Cancellations must be made in writing, either by email or snail mail.

Cancellations received more than 6 months prior to start date will receive full refund of deposit.

Cancellations received between 6 and 4 months prior to start date will receive 50% refund of deposit.

Cancellations received less than 4 months prior to start date will receive refund only if the vacant spot is filled.