

# BEST OF COSTA RICA

FEBRUARY 9-20, 2021

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Green Thorntail. Photo: D. Ascanio ®

*Often called "the Switzerland of Central America," Costa Rica is a small, stable country with a prosperous middle class, fine educational system, and spectacular highland terrain. For its size, it is one of the richest countries in the world for birds, with over 850 known species from a small area the size of West Virginia. Costa Rica boasts the finest national park and reserve system in Latin America, protecting portions of all major habitats and the accompanying flora and fauna. Because of this, it has become one of the premier birding destinations in the world! This tour offers an excellent introduction to the joys of Neotropical birding, numerous regional specialties, and a chance to view such Neotropical mammals as monkeys, coatimundi and peccaries.*

*The Costa Rican landscape is remarkably diverse, and each of the four major regions we will visit forms a natural boundary for bird distribution. The humid Caribbean lowlands and foothills are directly linked to the great lowland forests of South America, with many rainforest birds spilling across the Panama "land bridge" to reach their northern limit here. The Carara national park located in the Pacific coast*

*is an isolated area of high rainfall, and a number of species are found only here. Most importantly, much of Costa Rica consists of a large highland mass dominated by immense volcanoes and rugged cordilleras. The distinctive birdlife here is completely different from that of the lowlands and includes a high number of endemics (birds found nowhere else in the world except adjacent Panama).*



Violet Sabrewing. Photo: D. Ascanio ®

*This time of year is a great time to bird Costa Rica, as bird activity is high, and the weather is good. As we explore each of these major habitats, we will search for many of Central America's most spectacular birds. At the top of the list must be the magnificent Resplendent Quetzal, but there are many more, including Great Curassow, Black Guan, Scarlet and Great Green Macaws, over 30 species of hummingbirds, several beautiful trogons, toucans and aracaries, motmots, Prong-billed Barbet, Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, Snowy Cotinga, manakins, woodcreepers and ovenbirds, and tanagers in abundance. The list seems endless! Join us this "spring" in Costa Rica for a truly unforgettable birding experience.*

**PLEASE NOTE:** This tour is designed for early morning departures, with some breakfast times as early as 5:00-05:30AM as it gets light early here! In some areas, we will return to the lodges for a noon break before going out again.

**February 9, Day 1: Arrival in San José, Costa Rica.** You should plan your flights to arrive in San José Juan Santamaria International Airport (airport code SJO) any time today. After clearing customs and immigration, you will be met by our ground operator and transferred to our hotel. Because most flights arrive San Jose this evening, there are no functions scheduled for today and you are on your own for dinner.

NIGHT: Doubletree Cariari by Hilton Hotel, San José

**February 10, Day 2: from San Jose to Bosque de Paz.** Our first day will find us driving from the Pacific lowlands across the heavily settled Meseta Central to a lush and beautiful mountain valley called Bosque de Paz, a lovely private reserve of 4500 acres (1800 hectares) set in the heart of the subtropical zone. Here the climate is cool and damp, the forest constantly misted by clouds rising upslope. Undoubtedly the hummingbird feeders will grab our attention first, and amidst the commoner species we may find Green Hermit, Black-bellied Hummingbird and Magenta-throated Woodstar. The forest is nearby, and in the epiphyte-laden trees we will seek such montane specialties as Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Prong-billed Barbet, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Golden-bellied Flycatcher, Ochraceous Wren, Black-faced Solitaire, Mountain Robin, Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, and Silver-throated Tanager. More widespread species include Mountain Elaenia, Slate-throated Redstart and Common Chlorospingus. Time permitting (and confirming the presence of the species with the local guide), we will take a detour to San Ramon, where the Three-wattled Bellbird have been seen in previous tours!

NIGHT: Bosque de Paz, Alajuela

**February 11, Day 3: Bosque de Paz Area.** Not far above Bosque de Paz, a winding country road climbs to higher elevations on a steep ridge. Most of the slopes here are still covered in cool and wet temperate forest, popularly called “cloud forest”, and today we will explore this habitat. Some of the finest birds of Central America inhabit this region, including Black Guan, Collared Trogon, Streak-chested Treehunter, Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Spangle-cheeked Tanager and Black-thighed Grosbeak. The enchanting songs of Black-faced Solitaires and nightingale-thrushes sound through the forest, while Gray-breasted Wood-wrens, Costa Rican Warblers and others lurk in the understory. Occasional raptors are spotted over the ridges, including Great Black-Hawk and the rare Solitary Eagle, and here we will have our first chance for Resplendent Quetzal, considered by many the most beautiful bird in the world.

NIGHT: Bosque de Paz, Alajuela

**February 12, Day 4. Drive to Cerro de La Muerte.** As we begin our journey, this morning we will drive to the Cerro Buenavista, at the Talamanca Mountains, where we will bird the temperate (montane) forests on the Cerro de la Muerte massif. The road reaches even a small pre-paramo habitat (above tree line) where, weather permitting, we will also go birding given that some high elevation birds are only found here, and that includes the fairly common Volcano Junco and the always-shy Peg-billed Finch. As we ascend this section of the Panamerican Highway, we will begin to notice the presence of tree ferns in the evergreen forest that will, eventually be embedded in the clouds, giving a mysterious appearance, where wonderful birds are found. Among the species that we can see today are Sulphur-winged Parakeet, Fiery-throated Hummingbird, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Ruddy Treerunner, Buffy Tuftedcheek, Black-billed and Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrushes, Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, Yellow-winged Vireo, Flame-throated and Black-cheeked warblers, Collared Redstart, Flame-colored Tanager, Yellow-thighed Finch, Slaty Flowerpiercer, Black-thighed Grosbeak and Sooty-capped Bush-Tanager. Most of these species are found only in the isolated mountain forests of Costa Rica and adjacent Panama, and few of them range below 6000 feet. Here we will also have our second chance to enjoy Costa Rica's glamorous bird, the Resplendent Quetzal. The lodge landscaping attracts hummingbirds in abundance, including Volcano, Scintillant, Stripe-tailed and Talamanca hummingbirds, as well as White-throated Mountain-gems. In addition, Torrent Tyrannulet may be seen foraging in the nearby stream.

NIGHT: Trogon Lodge, San Gerardo de Dota

**February 13, Day 5: Cerro de la Muerte.** A full day in the vicinity of San Gerardo de Dota will increase our chances for finding the much sought-after Resplendent Quetzal. We will be in contact with local farmers to learn about the recent sightings and will surely organize our outings to increase the chances of seeing this amazing species. Also, we will come across opportunities to look for Volcano Hummingbird, Collared Trogon, Silvery-fronted Tapaculo (always difficult to see), Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Ochraceous Pewee, Black-capped Flycatcher, Barred Becard and Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher. In previous years we have enjoyed feeding flocks containing Flame-throated and Black-cheeked warblers, Collared Redstart, Silver-throated Tanager and other passerine birds. Depending on weather conditions, after lunch we will explore the higher elevations along the road to look for the secretive Black Guan or the more widespread Sooty Thrush. In some years, we have reported large

groups of Barred Parakeet in flight and although they are usually distant, it is exciting to know about the presence of such little-known species. Given that the lodge landscaping attracts hummingbirds in abundance, we will plan to explore this area sometime in the day as well.

NIGHT: Trogon Lodge, San Gerardo de Dota

**February 14, Day 6: From Cerro de la Muerte to the Sarapiquí lowlands.** After an early breakfast, we will take a detour to Bosque del Tolomuco, a nature retreat with feeders that offer the opportunity to look for White-tailed Emerald and Snowy-bellied Hummingbird, two species that are unlikely to be seen in any other area of this tour. There might also be Lesser Violetear, Green Hermit, Scintillant Hummingbird and Violet Sabrewing. We will also look for Emerald Toucanet and possibly the secretive Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush. This morning we will travel from the cloud forest to the rich and lush Caribbean lowlands of Costa Rica. The route and birding stops will be determined by the latest bird records by local birders. In some years, we have visited a mountain river where the astonishing Sunbittern was seen. In other years, we have seen the astonishing Snowcap, foraging in the vicinity of a vervain garden. Expect a day of travel and birding, and maybe with one or more surprises!

NIGHT: La Quinta de Sarapiquí, Sarapiquí

**February 15, Day 7: La Selva Field Station. Boat trip Sarapiquí river.** The Sarapiquí region, although now largely cleared and settled, harbors the richest avifauna in the country, and birds are generally conspicuous. We will explore the humid tropical lowlands and the contiguous farmlands. Today we will visit the world-famous La Selva Field Station of the Organization for Tropical Studies (near Puerto Viejo). The great diversity of habitats here includes tall lowland rainforest, second growth of varying ages, overgrown plantations, successional thickets, riverine forest, and swampy pastures. Within these habitats are numerous specialized niches. All are home to a wonderful variety of tropical birds. Initially we will linger along the La Selva entry road, getting acquainted with the common birds of the open country and second growth. Flycatchers, tanagers, and seedeaters are abundant and conspicuous in the early morning hours. Later in the morning we will explore the reserve trail, trying to see manakins, antbirds and probably a poison dart frog! Just a few of the special birds possible are Great and Little tinamous; Green Ibis; Crested Guan and even Great Curassow; Semiplumbeous Hawk; Russet-naped Wood-Rail; Great Green Macaw; Mealy, White-crowned and Brown-hooded parrots; Slaty-tailed and Gartered trogons; Amazon Kingfisher; Broad-billed and Rufous motmots; White-whiskered Puffbird; Keel-billed and Yellow-throated (Chestnut-mandibled) toucans; Collared Aracari; Chestnut-colored Woodpecker; Black-striped Woodcreeper; Great Antshrike; White-collared Manakin; Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant; Long-tailed Tyrant; Stripe-breasted and Black-throated wrens; Shining Honeycreeper; Montezuma Oropendola; Scarlet-rumped Cacique; Dusky-faced Tanager; and Orange-billed Sparrow. The more open country harbors such non-forest species as Striped Cuckoo; Olive-throated Parakeet; Olive-crowned Yellowthroat; Crimson-collared Tanager; Black-headed Saltator; Black-cowled Oriole; and various seed-eating birds.

After lunch in La Quinta we will enjoy a deserved siesta time, and in the afternoon, we will have the opportunity to visit the boundaries of La Selva while exploring the banks of the Sarapiquí River. We will be using a covered boat to explore the river where riverine forest birds are usually found, including Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Green Heron and Green Ibis. The boat trip also offers a good opportunity for seeing Squirrel Cuckoo, Gartered Trogon, any of the 3 species of kingfishers (Ringed, Amazon and Green kingfishers) and Collared Aracari. Mangrove Swallow will be common and might even get perched on the roof of the boat. In some years we have been rewarded with views of the Secretive and absolutely astonishing Sunbittern and we will keep searching for it. Also, Black River Turtles will be taking a sun bath while an Anhinga will probably be seen drying its wings from an open branch.

NIGHT: La Quinta de Sarapiquí, near Puerto Viejo





**Broad-billed Motmot. Photo: D. Ascanio ®**

**February 16, Day 8: Braulio Carrillo National Park and buffer area: Aerial Tram.** Today we will have a full morning to explore the Braulio Carrillo National Park and an adjacent 1,100-acre private reserve about an hour from La Quinta. Created in 1978, Braulio Carrillo National Park encompasses a huge band of wet Caribbean foothill forest. In 1987, the road was finally completed, and the park opened to the public. Now birders have access to some of the country's rarest, least known and most restricted species in this fabulous area of steep forested slopes, cloud-filled valleys, and plunging waterfalls. We will devote all morning to the area, which will include an unforgettable 90-minute Aerial Tram ride, and hike along the trails on portions of the preserve. The tram ride enables us to traverse all levels of a Caribbean foothill rainforest canopy and later explore the rainforest trails on this privately-owned property. The forest edge is not far away, and we're sure to spot some spectacular large birds sitting up in the crowns of the trees. These may include Crested Guan, Mealy and White-crowned parrots, Gartered Trogon, Keel-billed and Yellow-throated toucans, Collared Aracari, Snowy Cotinga, Montezuma Oropendola, Yellow-tailed Oriole and even Great Green Macaw. Close to the station itself are dense secondary thickets with young trees and vine-tangled forest edge, the preferred habitat for birds like Rufous-tailed Jacamar; Great and

Fasciated antshrikes; Long-tailed Tyrant; White-collared Manakin; Black-throated and Cabani's wrens; honeycreepers; Plain-colored, Crimson-collared and Scarlet-rumped (Passerini's) tanagers; or Black-headed and Buff-throated saltators. Hummingbirds visit the flowering shrubs, including Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird and White-necked Jacobin. We will also search for an absolutely stellar line-up of tanagers, such as Emerald, Silver-throated, Speckled, Spangle-cheeked, Blue-and-gold, Black-and-yellow and Tawny-crested, as well as White-throated Shrike-Tanager. Many other birds also occur, but for various reasons, the chances of seeing them are vanishingly small.

Nevertheless, just being where they occur and knowing that one of them could turn up is exciting. This remarkable group includes Tiny Hawk, Violaceous Quail-Dove, Rufous-vented Ground-Cuckoo, Black-crowned Antpitta, and Bare-necked Umbrellabird.



NIGHT: La Quinta de Sarapiquí, near Puerto Viejo

**February 17, Day 9: Drive to Villa Lapas.** We will start our day driving across a road known as *La Virgen*. This road quickly ascends the Caribbean slope of Costa Rica, one of the wettest regions in Central America. This is an incredibly lush and scenic wonderland of rushing water and deep valleys, much of it still covered in a profusion of exotic plants. We plan to stop at the side of the road (Cinchona) where a local family feeds hummingbirds and tanagers and chances for seeing Green-crowned Brilliant, Violet Sabrewing, Coppery-headed Emerald and Green Thorntail abound. There are also plenty of other birds around the feeders and forest edge including Prong-billed Barbet, Red-faced Spinetail, flycatchers, Silver-throated and several other dazzling tanagers. Time permitting, we will continue our drive to the road entering the Poás Volcano where we will look for the elusive Wren-thrush, and we might come across more tanagers and possibly a feeding flock containing tyrant-flycatchers and foliage-gleaners. Lunch will be on the way down to San Jose in a restaurant that has hummingbird feeders, and this will be our unique opportunity to add two more hummingbird species to our list, the White-bellied and Purple-throated mountain-gems. In the early afternoon we will continue our drive to the Pacific lowlands of Costa Rica, arriving in the late afternoon to Villa Lapas, our location for the next full day, which is contiguous to Carara national park. The hotel is situated along a forested stream and is beautifully landscaped, with an abundance of birds right around the grounds. The variety of flycatchers is especially noteworthy, and we should have many chances to study and learn them here.

NIGHT: Villa Lapas, Carara

**February 18, Day 10: Carara National Park and nearby.** Established in 1978, Carara is located near the Pacific coast in the transition zone between the dry northwest and the very wet southwest. This large park is virtually the only tall tropical moist forest remaining in the Pacific lowlands and is therefore an especially important faunal reserve. We have two full days to explore this very birdy region. At first, we will watch for large birds sitting up along the forest edge, later walking the forest trails. The reserve abounds with birds, but it is most famous for its relict population of Scarlet Macaws. This is our best chance to seeing this fabulous, much-persecuted species. At daybreak raucous pairs majestically fly from their roosts to their feeding grounds, sometimes landing where we can watch them in the scopes.

Carara abounds with birds large and small, an interesting blend of species from both regions. Especially noteworthy are the dozen or so species endemic to the wet region south of here, including Baird's Trogon, Fiery-billed Aracari (difficult to see), Golden-naped Woodpecker, Black-hooded Antshrike, Orange-collared Manakin, and Riverside Wren. All have extremely small world ranges that are threatened by deforestation, and all can be hard to locate. Among



the many other forest dwellers possible here are Slaty-tailed, Black-throated, Black-headed, and Gartered trogons; Rufous-tailed Jacamar; Pale-billed Woodpecker; Plain Xenops; Cocoa Woodcreeper; Barred Antshrike; Dot-winged Antwren; Dusky and Chestnut-backed antbirds; Streak-chested Antpitta; Red-capped Manakin; a remarkable array of flycatchers from large to small; Rose-throated Becard; Rufous-breasted and Black-bellied wrens; and Gray-headed and White-shouldered tanagers. Raptors are diverse in this blend zone. In the afternoon we will take a relaxing boat trip on the nearby Tarcoles River and estuary, perhaps finding Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Wood Stork, Common Black-Hawk, Collared Plover, Turquoise-browed Motmot and several kingfishers, as well as a good variety of other waterbirds.

NIGHTS: Villa Lapas, Carara

**February 19, Day 11: Morning at Villa Lapas; Afternoon Drive to San Jose.** Because of the incredible diversity of species possible in this region, we will offer an early morning walk around the lodge's property. We will decide the habitat to go birding upon the needed birds of our list. It could be a forest edge to look for the Pale-billed Woodpecker, or a grassland to search for the restless Stripe-headed Sparrow. Even further away, it could be a farmland to find the astonishing Turquoise-browed Motmot. There will be many options, and we will pick the one that will offer the best birding of all! In the afternoon, we will leave Caracas to drive back to San Jose, to prepare ourselves for a final checklist session and get ready for the flight back home.

NIGHT: Doubletree Cariari by Hilton Hotel, San José



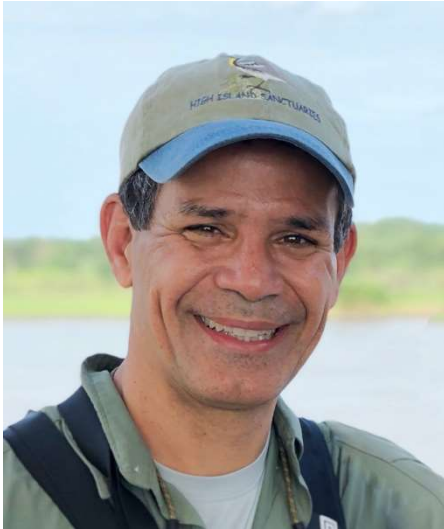
**Sunbittern. Photo: D. Ascanio ®**

**February 20, Day 12: Departure for Home.** The tour ends this morning with a transfer to the San José airport for flights departing before noon today. Transfers for flights departing at other times can be arranged in advance at an additional charge. When booking your return flight please keep in mind that transfers will depart from the hotel three hours before the scheduled departing flight time. In other words, if you schedule an early morning flight, your departure from the hotel will be very early.

**EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS:** Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

**TOUR LEADERS:** David Ascanio assisted by a local guide



**David Ascanio**, a Venezuelan birder and naturalist, has spent over 35 years guiding birding tours throughout his native country, Colombia, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, the Amazon River, Guyana, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the Lesser Antilles, Cuba, the Orinoco River, Costa Rica, Chile, and Panama. He is especially interested in bird vocalizations and has a private library containing sounds of more than 70% of all the birds of Venezuela. David combines superb birding skills with an astonishing command of bird vocalizations. He has published a book for children about the songs of the birds of Venezuela, and has coauthored the descriptions of two new species, the River Island Spinetail and the Delta Amacuro Softtail. David has also published various manuscripts about the birds of the *llanos* (plains), the Orinoco River island species, and the pan-tepui endemic species for which he has become an authority. He is the first author of the *Field Guide to the Birds of Venezuela* (2017, Helm Field Guides). David is an excellent communicator, has a great sense of humor, and is tireless in helping others find birds and wildlife. These traits have made him one of the most popular naturalists/guides in the Neotropics.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is **\$5,145** per person in double occupancy from San Jose, Costa Rica. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to breakfast on Day 13, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to San Jose and return, airport departure taxes, dinner on Day 1, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$645**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard, Visa, or American Express at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at [www.ventbird.com](http://www.ventbird.com)) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

**PAYMENTS:** All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard, Visa, American Express), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days (September 12, 2020) prior to the tour departure date.

**MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE REQUIREMENT:** This tour visits remote locations where immediate access to primary medical care may **NOT** be available. **For this reason, travel insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation is required for participation on this tour.** This coverage is included in the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** program. Through Ripcord, “emergency evacuation” can be purchased as a stand-alone benefit or as part of a comprehensive travel insurance policy. If you choose not to purchase



insurance through Ripcord, you are required to obtain it through another provider.

**EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES:** In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

**CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:** Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For your protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

If you cancel:

180 days or more before departure date

179 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

Your refund will be:

Your deposit minus \$500\*

No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded

No refund available

\*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

Upon cancellation of the transportation or travel services, where you, the customer, are not at fault and have not cancelled in violation of the terms and conditions of any of the contract for transportation or travel services, all sums paid to VENT for services not received by you will be promptly refunded by VENT to you unless you otherwise advise VENT in writing. This policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside the services described in the tour itinerary.

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**TRAVEL INSURANCE:** To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Resolutions as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™**. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most highly regarded travel insurance programs available.

Critical benefits of **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance** include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation and rescue services** from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice; comprehensive travel insurance for **trip cancellation/interruption**, primary medical expense coverage, and much more. **Waiver for pre-existing**

**conditions is available but must be purchased within 14 days of tour deposit.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as security evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or other security events, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause (must be purchased within 14 days of tour deposit). Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: [ripcordrescuetravelinsurance.com/ventbird](http://ripcordrescuetravelinsurance.com/ventbird); or click the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. ***Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be responsible for any air ticket penalties.***

**BAGGAGE:** We request participants limit their baggage to one medium-sized soft-side roller bag or duffel bag or suitcase, and one carry-on, if possible, as space in the vehicle will be limited. Extra luggage can be stored at our hotel in San José if you so desire. Laundry can be done at all of the hotels at which we stay more than one night. As a precaution, we suggest you pack your travel documents, medications, toiletries, a change of clothes, and your binoculars in your carry-on bag. The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your airline to find out specific weight restrictions. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government’s attempts to improve airport security we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most updated information: <http://www.tsa.gov/>.

**CLOTHING / CLIMATE:** As is the case for all of our tropical tours, lightweight field clothing is the norm for Costa Rica tours. Long-sleeved shirts, a hat, sunglasses, and a strong sunscreen are recommended for protection from the sun. Also, please be sure to have a pair of good water-resistant hiking boots or walking shoes and a second pair of lightweight shoes. Mud boots are not necessary. Generally, the weather will be warm to hot and humid (75 to 90 degrees). It will be cooler at several high-elevation locations (with temperatures perhaps as low as the low 50s or even 40s), so a thermal top and warm sweater or jacket are essential for layering. If you chill easily, consider bringing a pair of gloves and stocking cap. Trails should not be so muddy at this season as to require rubber boots; water-resistant footwear is best. Please note that you must have a pair of shoes/boots of some kind to enter La Selva (sandals are not allowed). Do not forget to bring a small umbrella and/or poncho, as we may get caught out in mist or rain.

**DOCUMENTS:** A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Costa Rica is required. Visas are not required for entry by U.S. citizens. Non-U.S. citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions. Although no vaccinations are required for entry into Costa Rica, you may be asked to present proof of a current yellow fever vaccination if you have traveled recently in other countries within Latin America or Africa.

**EQUIPMENT:** You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good repair, along with a belt pack or day pack (for carrying books, sunscreen, sundries, etc.). As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medication and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leader will have a spotting scope, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so. Pack a small flashlight, and an alarm clock. A small folding umbrella is also a good idea for mist and light rain.

**HEALTH:** If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against hepatitis types A and B.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at [wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel). Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html) (click on Travel Health).

The drinking water is good everywhere that this tour goes in Costa Rica. We recommend that you bring a supply of aspirin or any other medication you think you might need during the trip. Imodium tablets are recommended for traveler's diarrhea.

**INSECT PROTECTION:** Chiggers are occasionally a problem in some areas. For prevention of bites, we recommend regular use of a repellent lotion (small plastic squeeze bottle) and a pump-style container of insect repellent that has close to 100% DEET. Topsy gel is useful in reducing irritation from stings or bites, and some cortisone creams are available without prescription. Also, "Flowers of Sulphur" powder has proven effective for deterring chiggers (ask your pharmacist).

**A Note About Chiggers:** This tour visits areas where chiggers are known to occur. Chiggers are tiny parasitic mites found in most warm weather areas of the southern United States and the world's tropics. They are especially numerous in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to other animals or humans who make contact with the grass as they pass by. Chiggers do not suck blood and the majority of the world's species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids, however, through a process in which a digestive enzyme is produced by the chigger which essentially liquefies the skin around the area where the chigger is attached. The chigger is not usually attached to the skin for more than a few hours before it either falls off or is knocked off. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area as a defense against the chigger's digestive enzyme. Though the chigger may be long gone, it is the presence of the hardened area, and the body's natural process of reabsorbing it that typically causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, like around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows.

Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

- Avoid walking, or standing in particular, in areas dominated by grass. These areas are where one is most likely to encounter chiggers.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to avoid direct skin-to-grass contact. Chiggers can find their way through clothing, but this is a standard and effective prevention technique commonly employed by many.
- Apply a cream-style insect repellent, such as "Cutters" to your body from the waist down BEFORE putting on your clothing.
- Spray your pants and socks with a spray repellent such as "Cutters" or "Off." Repellents with high concentrations of DEET (70-100%) are most effective. You do not need to apply these to your skin, only to clothing. (Be careful as DEET will damage plastics and lens coatings). Repel Permanone is an odorless aerosol insecticide that offers perhaps the best defense against chiggers. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online. It should only be applied to clothes and allowed to dry before you dress. Never apply Permanone directly to the skin. Permethrin is known to be a highly toxic chemical to insects. It is the active ingredient in Permanone but is present in a small amount (0.5%).
- Powdered sulfur applied to waist, bottoms of pants, sock and boots is also effective at repelling chiggers. However, be warned that clothes will retain the sulfur odor for several washings.
- Shower at the end of each day in the field. Use a washcloth to vigorously rub your legs, feet, and ankles.

By following these methods, you should be able to avoid all chigger bites, as well as tick bites. If, however, you are bitten by chiggers anyway, you can reduce or eliminate the symptoms by applying benzocaine or hydrocortisone creams, calamine lotion, After Bite, or any number of anti-itch products.



**MISCELLANEOUS:**

Departure Tax - now included in cost of air tickets with most major airlines.

Currency – US \$ are widely accepted, as are Visa and Mastercard, so there is no need to change dollars into Costa Rican colones.

Electricity – 110/220 volts (same as USA); two-pin plugs are standard.

Language – Spanish, although English is widely spoken.

Time – Central Standard Time

Internet Access – available at all locations (and generally, but not always, reliable).

**SUGGESTED READING:** A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

***Field Guides (Birds):***

Garrigues, Richard and Robert Dean, *The Birds of Costa Rica: A Field Guide*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007. Compact and complete, now the recommended field guide.

Stiles, Gary and Alexander Skutch. *A Guide to the Birds of Costa Rica*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990. The first field guide specifically for Costa Rica and still very useful, especially the text.

Ridgely, Robert S. *A Guide to the Birds of Panama*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Edition expanded to include Costa Rica and excellent for use here.

***Field Guides (other):***

DeVries, Philip. *The Butterflies of Costa Rica & Their Natural History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. Lovely guide to butterflies; but no longer easy to obtain.

Glassberg, Jeffrey. *A Swift Guide to the Butterflies of Mexico and Central America*. Sunstreak Books, 2007. The most practical guide to the butterflies of Costa Rica if this is one of your special interests.

Leenders, Twan. *A Guide to Amphibians and Reptiles of Costa Rica*. A Zona Tropical Publication; 2001.

Wainwright, Mark. *The Mammals of Costa Rica*. Comstock Published (a division of Cornell University Press), 2007. Excellent guide to the mammals.

***Multimedia:***

“Costa Rica Birds – Field Guide” by BirdingFieldGuides.com. A good birding app for this trip.

***General Introduction to the Tropics:***

Forsyth, Adrian, and Ken Miyata. *Tropical Nature*. Scribner, 1987. Paperback available. Excellent chapters, very readable and informative. Written for the layman; highly recommended.

Forsyth, Adrian, *Portraits of the Rainforest*. With photos by Michael and Pat Fogden. Camden East, ONT: Camden House, 1990. Stunning photos and a superb text by one of the best nature writers in the business.

Hilty, Steven. *Birds of Tropical America*. Shelburne, VT: Chapters Publishing Ltd, 1994. An excellent, easy-to-read book on the ecology of neotropical birds. **Highly recommended**

Kricher, John C. *A Neotropical Companion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. Good introduction to the tropics.

***Further Reading:***

Janzen, Daniel H. (ed.). *Costa Rican Natural History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. An encyclopedia that contains a wealth of information on the plants and animals of Costa Rica, especially those that have been studied in the field; also has chapters on geology and soils, agriculture, etc. Recommended as a technical reference book.

Perry, Donald. *Life Above the Jungle Floor*. Simon & Schuster, 1986. Out of Print, but still available. A popular book that tells much about life in the tropical rainforest, especially in the little-known canopy.

Reid, Fiona A. *A Field Guide to the Mammals of Central America and Southeast Mexico*. Oxford University Press, 1997. Best mammal guide.

Skutch, Alexander F. *A Bird Watcher's Adventures in Tropical America*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977. Fun reading from an eminent ornithologist resident in Costa Rica.

Skutch, Alexander F. *A Naturalist in Costa Rica*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1971. Good general background in the tropics from a prolific and very readable author. Reprinted in 1992. Try [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com).

***App's:***

Merlin Bird ID. A state-of-the-art app that allows you to download packages of birds per country. Includes the most comprehensive and updated information. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Available in the App Store and Google Play.

Costa Rica Birds – Field Guide. Birding Field Guides. A good source of information with bird voices and range maps. It provides multiple filter choices and easy search function. Downloadable in the App Store, Amazon appstore and Google Play.

Mammals of North, Central and South America - A mammal app.

Sky Guide. If you're interested in stargazing, you might want to consider using this app. Just hold your device overhead and it will show you the stars, constellations and planets. Downloadable in the App Store and Google Play.

Maps.me. If you like checking routes, roads and locations, this app allows you to track the tour route even with your phone offline! Just download the app and the Costa Rica map and you will be all set. Downloadable in the App Store and Google Play.

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

**RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, “**VENT**”) act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure. If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant. Notwithstanding the foregoing, VENT will not provide any participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to any participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement, when and to the extent such failure or delay is caused by or results from acts beyond VENT's control, including, without limitation, the following force majeure events: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades in effect on or after the date of the scheduled tour; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other

industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

If a participant cancels any tour or any portion of a tour, VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by any participant (see VENT Registration & Deposit policy and Cancellation & Refunds policy contained in the itinerary). Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on August 13, 2020 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. If a participant is removed from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "***Airline***") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

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