Full Detailed Itinerary - Costa Rica: Photo Tour

Day 1: Arrival in San José

The tour begins this evening with dinner. After arrival in Costa Rica’s capital San José, you will be transferred to an excellent hotel. The hotel used is subject to availability, but many options have good chances to find birds right on the grounds.

Day 2: San José to La Quinta Sarapiqui

Today involves a bit of driving but before all of that, you will have a quick guided walk around some nearby hotspots with your local guide, targeting birds like; Spot-breasted Oriole, Rufous-naped Wren, Hoffmann's Woodpecker and potentially the very tricky Cinnamon Hummingbird. After this relaxing morning, we will spend the morning photographing at a little “hole in the wall” kind of place, but if you let the looks deter you, you would miss out on spectacular birds like Northern Emerald-Toucanet, Red-headed Barbet, Crimson-colored Tanager, Red-legged Honeyeater and if we're lucky, a Prong-billed Barbet. Hummingbirds are also on order here so we will be on the look out for Violet Sabrewing, Green-crowned Brilliant, and possibly even the endemic Coppery-headed Emerald. This general vicinity is also home to another spectacular bird, the Bat Falcon. We will have lunch here and then move on to our hotel for the evening. Depending on time, we might have a little walk around a nearby garden where we might photograph Common Tody Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Elaenia and Paltry Tyrannulet.

Day 3: Morning with Cope to Laguna del Lagarto

We spend a great morning with local guide, Cope. This legend potentially has some great birds for us. His local spots often yield Crested and Spectacled Owl while his tremendous backyard pond and feeders offer a variety of birds like Red-legged Honeycreeper, Orange-chinned Parakeet, Chestnut-headed Oropendola and a host of colorful tanager species. After some food, we'll travel north towards Laguna del Lagarto where we'll spend the next three nights. Along the way, we may have time to visit "Frogs Heaven" where can photograph Red-eyed Tree Frog and a variety of Poison Dart Frogs.

Day 4: Laguna del Lagarto

Today we will spend the morning in the King Vulture hide. Nothing can quite describe the feeling of watching vultures devour scraps of meat just feet from your face. You have to try this. Part of the he afternoon will be spent photographing the perches around the lodge – it can be difficult to pull yourself away from these excellent setups! There will also be time free time to explore, have a rest, do some snake photography, or anything else you would like. Nights around the lodge can yield owls so we will take advantage of those opportunities as they come.

Day 5: Laguna del Lagarto

More time at Laguna del Lagarto is never a bad thing. We'll enjoy the feeders, and grounds for more incredible photo opportunities of the local tanagers, woodpeckers, hummingbirds and anything else we can get our lenses on.

Day 6: Laguna de Lagarto to the Arenal Area

Today we will drive to the Arenal area and hit several hotspots for photography. Along the way, we may have time to visit "Frogs Heaven" where can photograph Red-eyed Tree Frog and a variety of Poison Dart Frogs. At Arenal, it will be mostly trail photography in the mornings and then we will visit a site that is really quite excellent for set-up frog photography. The mornings will involve some easy walking but will hopefully give us chances as Broad-billed, Keel-billed and Rufous Motmots, White-throated Crake, a handful of common tanagers and a host of other typical forest birds like Hoffmann's Woodpecker, Gray-headed Chachalaca, and Barred Antshrike. We'll spend two nights near the Arenal Volcano.

Day 7: Three-wattled Bellbird and San Ramon Area

Today we will spend a morning with one of the more iconic Costa Rican birds, Three-wattled Bellbird. We will link up with our local guide who will take us around and hopefully (it is of course never a guarantee) get our lenses on a great bird in a cool setting. Other birds typically available include the cute White-eared Ground Sparrow, Golden-olive Woodpecker and Yellow-faced Grassquit. After this lovely morning we will do a series of feeders to add to our photo collection. Birds like; Tawny-capped Euphonia, Speckled and Emerald Tanagers are all possibilities.

Day 8: Arenal to the Volcan Tenorio region

We will focus on two difficult hummingbirds, the Black-crested Coquette and the Snowcap. Other fun birds around include Yellow-throated Toucan, Tody Motmot and if we're lucky, we may set our eyes on a Tapir or White-nosed Coati. We have one night in one of several lodges in this area.

Day 9: Volcan Tenorio to the Pacific

We'll spend the morning in the Volcan Tenorio region, then we head to the dry Pacific. Here birds like Black-headed Trogon, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Boat-billed Flycatcher and Pacific Screech Owl await. We'll spend the night in one of the lodges in this region.

Day 10: La Ensenada to the Tarcoles Area

La Ensenada is a large reserve with a lodge right on the Pacific coast. Along with a good variety of dry forest species, there is a lagoon out behind the lodge that can host a variety of great birds like Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, and Northern Jacana. In the afternoon we drive south to the Tarcoles area, where we spend two nights.

Day 11: Tarcoles area

Today we have an early start as we take a boat ride on the Tarcol River for about 3 hours. There are two areas in particular we need to visit, the mangroves and the main river. The early morning will be spent on the open river and then we will retreat into the mangroves as the morning goes on. The river will hold targets like Yellow-headed Caracara, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Amazon, Ringed, Green, and American Pygmy Kingfishers, Crested Caracara, a host of shorebirds, Scarlet Macaw and a few raptors like Plumbeous Kite and Common Black Hawk. We will then meet up with a local guide in Orotina, who knows spots for Long-tailed Manakin, the gorgeous little Pearl Kite, and others. Year to year the spots and birds vary so we will just have to see what he has in store for us!

Day 12: Tarcoles to the Talamanca Highlands

After another morning with our local guide, we'll drive up into the mountains and spend two nights at one of several excellent lodges in the area.

Day 13: Talamanca Highlands

This scenic part of Costa Rica is wonderful, unique, and packed full of spectacular species. The first morning will be spent looking for our main target, the Resplendent Quetzal. During this time of year, the quetzals are typically nesting so we should have some great opportunities here, and should we not have any luck, we'll have another chance tomorrow. We will spend the afternoon photographing the hummingbirds species, and also visit a lovely location down in the valley with more feeders that bring in subjects like Spotted Wood-Quail, Acorn Woodpecker, several brushfinches and thrushes, White-throated Mountain Gem, Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, Scintillant Hummingbird, and a host of tanagers.

Day 14: Talamanca Highlands to San José

We have a number of options for our last morning, and we'll make a plan based on whatever we are most eager to get better photos of. We may spend some time around our lodge photographing birds like Mountain Thrush, Fiery-throated and Talamanca Hummingbirds, Mountain Elaenia, Tufted Flycatcher, Black-capped Flycatcher, and Long-tailed and Black-and-Yellow Silky-flycatchers. We could try again for the quetzal if we weren't lucky the day before, or we could revisit one of the feeding setups. It truly is a magical area. In the afternoon we drive back to San José for a final night.

Day 15: Departure from San José

The tour ends this morning with transfers to the airport; there are no photo shoots planned for this day, but you are welcome to do so on your own around the wonderful hotel grounds.

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