Full Detailed Itinerary - Costa Rica: The Introtour

Day 1: Arrival in San José

You will be picked up at the airport and taken to a nearby hotel for the night. The exact hotel depends on availability, but when possible we try to pick hotels with good birding on the grounds, so you can start getting your eye in while you wait for the rest of the group to arrive.

Day 2: San José to Puerto Viejo

After some pre-breakfast birding near our hotel, we'll drive through the enormous Braulio Carillo National Park and onto the Caribbean slope. We'll visit a private forest reserve near the park, which has hummingbird feeders, and often roosting nightbirds. Spectacled Owl is the most regular of these, but sometimes Crested Owl and Great Potoo are around too. Besides these birds, there will be plentiful birds on our first day in the so-called 'Bird Country' of Costa Rica. Chestnut-headed and Montezuma Oropendolas both nest on the property, and the forest and edges are home to Russet-naped Wood-Rail, Collared Aracari, Yellow-throated and Keel-billed Toucans, and Red-legged and Green Honeycreepers. We'll stop for lunch at a local restaurant, then drive another hour or so to Puerto Viejo, where we spend two nights in the La Selva Biological Station (or one of several lodges nearby if unavailable). In the afternoon, there should be enough time to begin birding the Caribbean lowlands, picking up some of the regular species like Scarlet-rumped and Golden-hooded Tanagers, Black-faced Grosbeak, and Olive-backed Euphonia; while keeping an eye in the surrounding treetops may yield Yellow-throated or Keel-billed Toucans, or a Collared Aracari. Note: on some tours, we stay at a lodge near Puerto Viejo for the nights of day 2 and day 3 and visit La Selva as a day trip.

Day 3: La Selva

Bird activity around the cabins and cafeteria can be so intense in the early morning that it is hard to make any progress down the trails, and often the day is over before you know it. Montezuma Oropendolas, White-crowned Parrots, and Keel-billed and Yellow-throated Toucans are some of the more impressive species, but the smaller and more brightly colored birds are also mesmerizing. Scarlet-rumped and Golden-hooded Tanagers, Blue Dacnis, several euphonias, Mistletoe Tyrannulet, Black-cowled Oriole, and Rufous-tailed Jacamar can often be easy to see here. We might also see one of the tame Crested Guans around the edge of the clearing as well. This area can also be good for finding White-collared Manakin, and Black-cheeked, Cinnamon and Chestnut-colored Woodpeckers. Venturing farther into the reserve, we'll walk some of the wide, flat trails, where we get into tall rainforest where we'll search for other species like Great Tinamou, Rufous and Broad-billed Motmots, Gartered and Slaty-tailed Trogons, Rufous-winged Woodpecker, White-ringed Flycatcher, and the local Plain-colored Tanager. We'll also search the open country at the edge of the forest for the rare Great Green Macaw, and also check here for Laughing Falcon, Gray Hawk, and Yellow-crowned Euphonia. As well as birds we'll be on the lookout for sloths, howler monkeys, agoutis, and peccaries too. It is also a great place to see the Strawberry Poison Frog.

Day 4: Puerto Viejo to Savegre

We'll have a final morning in this area targeting whatever we still need, before departing for Savegre in the Talamanca mountains. Much of the afternoon will be spent driving, although there should be time to check out some hummingbird feeders shortly after arrival. The hummer feeders in the area regularly attract Talamanca Hummingbirds and Lesser Violetear. We'll spend two nights at one of several lodges in or near the Savegre Valley.

Day 5: Savegre Valley

The Savegre Valley is dominated by magnificent oak cloudforests, home to many species restricted to the high mountains of Costa Rica and western Panama, (known as "Chiriquí endemics"). Mixed species flocks here can be fantastic, with many of these special birds moving together, including Collared Redstart, Black-cheeked and Flame-throated Warblers, Ochraceous Wren, Ruddy Treerunner, Flame-colored and Spangle-cheeked Tanagers, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, and Yellow-thighed Brushfinch. The real star of Savegre is the astounding Resplendant Quetzal, without a doubt one of the world's most spectacular birds. There are usually several stakeouts in the valley at this time, and nowhere else do we stand a better chance of finding Costa Rica's flagship species. Our main focus of the day will be to track down this must-see bird. Other species we may also find while birding the valley include Band-tailed Pigeon, Sulphur-winged Parakeet, Yellow-winged and Brown-capped Vireos, Acorn Woodpecker, Mountain Elaenia, Black-capped Flycatcher, Mountain Thrush, Black-faced Solitaire, Black-billed and Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrushes, Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, and Sooty-capped Chlorospingus.

Day 6: Cerro de la Muerte to Carara

Today, after breakfast, we'll pack up and head up to the stunted treeline forest and páramo habitat just over 10,000 ft (3000 m), which will be the highest point reached on the tour. The weather can be forbidding, and only a few hardy birds, like Volcano Hummingbird, Sooty Thrush, Timberline Wren, Slaty Flowerpiercer, and Volcano Junco can make a living up here. If we're lucky we may also track down some of the scarcer residents in the area, like Black-and-yellow Silky-Flycatcher, or Peg-billed Finch. We'll stop at a nearby restaurant where we should see the lovely Fiery-throated Hummingbird too. After lunch at a local restaurant, we'll drive on to Carara, in the lowlands of the Pacific Coast, where we'll stay for the following two nights.

Day 7: Carara Area

Before breakfast, we'll bird within the hotel grounds, the river often holds Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, and the scattered trees Black-headed Trogon or Pale-billed Woodpecker. Black-hooded Antshrike can also be found in the property, as can Fiery-billed Aracari, although a little luck is needed to find the latter species, which is scarce in this area. After breakfast we'll drive a short distance (10 minutes) to one of the forest trails within the national park. A huge list of target birds is found in the area, and we'll be on the lookout for Baird's Trogon, Riverside Wren, Orange-collared Manakin, Great Tinamou, Gray-chested Dove, White-whiskered Puffbird, Barred Anthshrike, Dot-winged Antwren, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Lesser Greenlet, Rufous-breasted Wren, and White-shouldered and Bay-headed Tanagers. If we are lucky, and we encounter an army ant swarm, we may also find Gray-headed Tanager, Bicolored Antbird or Tawny-winged Woodcreeper in attendance. After lunch, we'll take a relaxing, private, afternoon boat cruise on the Tarcol estuary and in the nearby mangroves, adding swathes of new birds. We'll be on the lookout for Double-striped Thick-knee, Southern Lapwing, Roseate Spoonbill, Yellow-headed Caracara, Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Boat-billed Heron, Common Black-Hawk, "Mangrove" (Yellow) Warbler, and Mangrove Vireo. If we are very lucky, we may even run into the rare Mangrove Hummingbird. Note: due to tides, we sometimes take the boat trip in the morning instead of the afternoon.

Day 8: Carara to Monteverde

We have another morning to bird in Carara, trying different trails for any missing birds. Later, we'll drive back north, where the lower Pacific slope mountains have some drier habitat with different birds like Lesser Ground-Cuckoo, White-fronted Parrot, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Streak-backed Oriole, and the spectacular White-throated Magpie-Jay. The vegetation becomes lush and green as we climb higher into the mountains, eventually arriving at Monteverde, a small mountain town on the Pacific slope near the Continental Divide, where we stay for two nights. There will be a little time to bird around the lodge on arrival, which could produce Emerald Toucanet, Rufous-and-white Wren, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush or Rufous-capped Warbler. The verbena shrubs in the garden can also attract both Steely-vented Hummingbird or Canivet's Emerald.

Day 9: Monteverde Area

Some pre-breakfast birding on the grounds of our lodge will give us a chance at picking up White-eared Ground-Sparrow, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Chestnut-capped Warbler or Rufous-and-white Wren. The lodge's fruit feeders may host Brown Jay, Northern Emerald-Toucanet, and Lesson's Motmot. We'll then head to one of the reserves in the Monteverde area and spend the rest of the morning slowly walking the easy trails. Mixed flocks in the reserve hold Prong-billed Barbet, Common Chloropsingus, Slate-throated Redstart, Red-faced Spinetail, Costa Rican Warbler, Slaty Antwren, and others. Less conspicuous species that are regularly seen include Black Guan, Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush, Yellowish Flycatcher, Black-faced Solitaire, Ochraceous Wren, and Golden-browed Chlorophonia. There are also quetzals here if we got unlucky in Savegre. After a morning working the trails, and lunch at an on-site restaurant, we'll check out their hummingbird feeders, which regularly attract Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, Green Hermit, Green-crowned Brilliant, Magenta-throated Woodstar, and Violet Sabrewing. After that we will bird one of the other reserves in the area, which could yield birds like Collared Trogon or Long-tailed Manakin.

Day 10: Monteverde to San José

We have another morning at one of the reserves in the Monteverde area; the exact location we visit will depend on what we are still looking for. After lunch, we'll head back to San José for the night. The exact hotel we use depends on availability – sometimes it is the same hotel we used on the first night, while other times it is a hotel near the airport with a convenient airport shuttle.

Day 11: Departure

The tour ends this morning as you are taken to the airport to meet your departing flight.

Toll free from the USA & Canada: (800) 348-5941

International number: +1-409-515-9110

Toll free from the UK: +0800-046-5654

Email: info@tropicalbirding.com