

For tours departing beyond 2007, itineraries may be subject to change. This will be confirmed by the publication of the 2008 brochure (issued in Oct 07).

2007
Tour Dossier

EXPLORE!

WORLDWIDE

COSTA RICA Dossier Ref. CC

Quetzals of the Cloudforest

Amended 11 Jun 2007. Valid from 01 Jun 2007 to 31 Dec 2007

JOINING TOUR ABROAD

15 days/14 nights Land Only
San José to San José

Join San José on Saturday (day 1)

End San José on Saturday (day 15)

Clients booked on 'Land Only' arrangements should make their way to the joining point in San José. Please refer to separate 'Joining Instructions' for name and address of hotel and time of rendezvous with tour leader.

GROUP TRAVEL FROM LONDON

16 days/15 nights Tour including
Connecting Group Flights
London-San José-London

Depart Saturday from London Heathrow to join tour in San José the same day. (day 1 of Land Only itinerary). Transfer to hotel.

Return Saturday from San José (day 15 of Land Only itinerary) and arrive at London Heathrow airport the next day, Sunday.

Please note that flights for this tour can transit through the USA. According to US law, all passengers must disembark, collect luggage and clear immigration before reboarding for the onward flight.

From 1 October 2004, UK, US, AUS, CAN and NZ passport holders including children and infants will only be permitted to enter the United States under the Visa Waiver Scheme (VWS) if they hold a machine readable passport. Should your passport not be machine readable it will be necessary to either obtain a new passport or to obtain a US visa. For UK passport holders see: <http://www.usembassy.org.uk>. Other nationalities should consult their consular office.

How can I check if my passport is Machine readable?

A machine readable passport (MRP) has 2 lines of characters across the bottom of the photograph page. Some passports issued by

Climate Care

The biggest environmental impact of our holidays is the international flight due to the emissions produced by the aircraft's engines. At Explore we offset all the CO₂ emissions generated by our staff flights, thus making Explore 'climate neutral'. See the Explore website for more details.

Earth Matters

- We support the Caribbean Conservation Corps in Tortuguero National Park by visiting every trip and encouraging people to help clean up the beach where turtles lay their eggs.
- Proceeds from the entry fees to Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve help to protect the highly endangered habitat of the Resplendent Quetzal, of which only 300 pairs remains in the world.

British consular posts abroad have a blank space instead of these characters and are not machine readable.

Passengers with non-group flights booked through Explore should refer to their individual confirmation invoice for flight details. Transfers to and from the airport are not included unless purchased in addition to the tour package.

SPECIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Among the many highlights featured on this trip, we mention:

- * **SAN JOSÉ** Orientation tour.
- * **POAS VOLCANOES** Walk to the crater.
- * **GUAYABO** Indian Ceremonial centre.
- * **TURRIALBA** Coffee growing and farming town.
- * **TORTUGUERO** Wildlife spotting from boat and rainforest walk.
- * **MONTEVERDE** Visit to Cloud-forest Reserve, home of the Quetzal.
- * **MANUEL ANTONIO** Forest Park famed for rich wildlife and sandy beaches.
- * **BIRDWATCHING** Hundreds of beautiful and exotic birds.

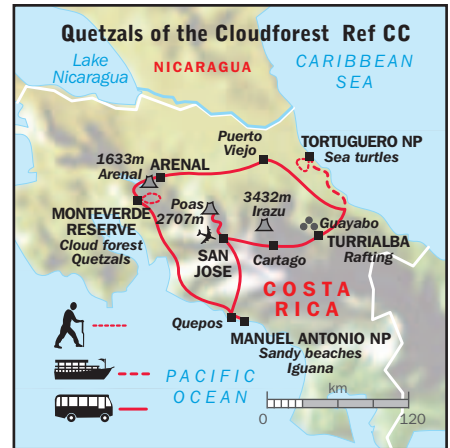
Flanked on one side by the Caribbean Sea and the other by the Pacific Ocean, tiny Costa Rica is a land of abundant natural attractions with a rich diverse flora and fauna. From coast to coast, it is only 118 kilometres at the narrowest point, but along the spine of the Cordillera rise high mountains and volcanoes: Chirripo Grande peak reaches 3,820m. It has more rivers and volume of water per square kilometre than any other country in the world except New Zealand and consequently there is lush vegetation with 1200 species of orchids. Nearly 27% of the landmass is protected and in the park system we find 139 species of mammals and 10% of the world's butterflies. It has long been Central America's most peaceful nation; the democracy is over 100 years old, and the army was abolished over fifty years ago. It was the first Central American country to allow women in to high schools and the government. Adult literacy is as high as 93% and the economy, based on the export of bananas and coffee, has produced the highest standard of living in Central America. A true naturalists' paradise, come and see what this peace-loving, friendly country can offer!

LAND ONLY ITINERARY

Be Prepared: While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day route printed below, a degree of flexibility is built into the itinerary. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

Accommodation and Included Meals: please find the key to our accommodation ratings overleaf, and note that included meals are indicated in the itinerary below and are shown on the day they are provided (B = breakfast, L = lunch, D = dinner).

Day 1. Saturday. Join tour San José
Arrive San José and check-in at hotel.
2 nights hotel H+.



Day 2. In San José

San José lies in a fertile valley at an altitude of 1150m. Coffee and sugar cane are grown in this area and coffee is still planted between new buildings and along the roadside on the outskirts of the city. This morning we'll head up to Volcan Poas National Park where the smoking volcano rises majestically from the beautiful tropical rainforest. The main crater is one of the largest in the world and there are many trails, one of which leads to a forest fringed lake where fiery throated humming birds can be seen feeding on colourful flowers. Alternatively, depending on local conditions, we may head up to Irazu, with equally spectacular views. In the afternoon we make an orientation tour of San José to get a feel for the city centre and main sights, including the National Museum. **(Included meal: B).**

Day 3. Drive to Turrialba

We drive to Cartago, the old colonial capital until 1823, situated at the foot of the Irazu volcano and encircled by mountains. We continue through coffee farming land to the town of Turrialba. On arrival there is the option to visit the remarkable serpentarium to witness Costa Rica's most venomous snakes on show. This evening your tour leader may be able to organise a visit to a typical 'Finca', where you can enjoy dinner prepared in a traditional family way (optional). **2 nights hotel H+ (included meal: B).**

Day 4. In Turrialba

A short bus journey brings us to the excavated Indian ceremonial centre at Guayabo, dating from AD 1000 to 1400. Here it is possible to see the excavated remains of village life as paved streets and water channels have been uncovered. The rest of the day is left free for personal exploration. Alternatively, there is an opportunity to try white water rafting on the Pacuare River (optional) may visit CATIE, an important agricultural research station, dedicated to conserving genetic diversity. **(included meal: B).**

Day 5. Drive and boat to Tortuguero

This morning we drive through extensive banana plantations to Cano Blanco where we board our boat to travel through the jungle waterways to Tortuguero. Partly artificial, created from narrow lagoons, and partly natural, a complex canal system links small isolated settlements. The rivers are rich in

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fish, including rainbow bass and grouper and support an abundance of birds such as heron, stork and kingfisher amongst others. We stay in a lodge in the National Park. **2 nights lodge H+ (included meals: B, L, D).**

Day 6. In Tortuguero National Park

A full day to explore the Park. At certain times of the year green turtles, leatherbacks and occasionally loggerheads can be seen struggling ashore to lay their eggs (leatherbacks can weigh up to 700lbs). Every year between June and September over five thousand turtles come ashore to nest on Tortuguero's beaches. There are many other animal species to watch out for such as the howler monkey noisily protecting its territory. The toucan, parrot and humming bird are amongst the hundreds of birds to be spotted whereas the ocelots, jaguar and tapir are shy and elusive. There is a full programme of included and optional excursions by boat and on foot to help you get the most out of this unique environment. **(Included meals: B, L, D).**

Day 7. Boat to Cano Blanco and Drive to Arenal

This morning we retrace our steps travelling by boat on this system of waterways, passing virgin forest, seemingly impenetrable with dense vegetation. In fact 33% of the jungle's total biomass is made up of ants and termites! In the afternoon we drive, skirting the great central volcanic massif, past fertile farmlands, rich with a diversity of tropical crops, brings us within sight of Arenal, Cost Rica's most active volcanic cone. This classic cone, which rises to 1,633m, is covered by a tangled mass of vegetation on one side while the other is starkly barren and old lava flows are visible. We recommend an evening bathe in the nearby thermal baths (optional). **2 nights hotel H+ (included meals: B, L).**

Day 8. In Arenal

The day is free to explore the area – you can take a walk across the Lava Trails of Arenal National Park with the towering backdrop of the volcano's barren flank ahead (optional). There are local trails to waterfalls and various optional rafting and float trips available, not to mention spa treatments with the volcanic mud! **(included meal: B).**

Day 9. Boat & drive to Monteverde

Today we use the exciting combination of boat and jeep to traverse the Laguna de Arenal to Monteverde. On arrival, there are plenty of activities on offer in this lush forested area, perched on the continental Divide between Pacific and Caribbean. **3 nights hotel H+ (included meal: B).**

Day 10 & 11. In Monteverde

We have two full days to take advantage of all the things there are to see and do around Monteverde. The famous, but now very rare, Resplendent Quetzal is fairly commonly seen in Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, one of the last remaining places in Central America where its habitat has been preserved. The best months are March and April, the breeding months. We include a morning guided walk searching for a glimpse of the three-wattled bell bird or the Quetzal, whose feathers were traded as valuable items throughout pre-Columbian America. Then you can spend the rest of the day

exploring the reserve, walking the paths that wind their way through gigantic ferns and giant trees dripping with lichen and moss. The rest of your time here maybe filled with optional activities such as the Canopy Tour, sliding down wires through the canopy, exploring the forest more sedately on suspension bridges, strung at canopy height, or on the fascinating Night walk. Alternatively you can spend an afternoon in the Santa Elena Reserve, supported by school children worldwide. There are also other private forest reserves in the area which can be explored, and various innovative local businesses to support. **(included meal: Bx2).**

Day 12. Drive to Manuel Antonio N.P.

From the cloud forest we descend to the Pacific coast enjoying staggering views over the Gulf and Peninsula of Nicoya. Heading south, we cross the Rio Tarcoles bridge from which huge crocodiles are regularly seen. We then pause at Carara Biological Reserve, famed for the scarlet macaws and abundant birdlife which populate this transitional forest, before continuing along the Pacific coast to Manuel Antonio National Park. **2 nights hotel H+ (included meal: B).**

Day 13. In Manuel Antonio N.P.

This morning we explore the Manuel Antonio park area, famed for its beautiful beaches and rich wildlife which includes Capuchin white-faced monkeys (which can be seen coming down to the beach), coatimundi, sloth and the tiny squirrel monkey. The remainder of the day can be spent relaxing on the white sandy beaches, enjoying a swim in the warm azure waters. The sunsets from this coast are spectacular and have to be seen to be believed!

Day 14. Drive to San José

After a morning relaxing, we leave the Pacific Ocean at about Midday, following the road back the way we came to Costa Rica's capital. **Overnight hotel H+.**

Day 15. Saturday. Tour ends San José (Included meal: B).

PERSONAL EXPENSES

You'll also need some extra money to cover meals not included in the tour price, other sightseeing, **airport taxes (approx. US\$26)**, border taxes, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Foreign Exchange

Local Currency: Costa Rican Colón.

Recommended Currency: US Dollars are legal tender in Costa Rica and they are accepted in most restaurants, hotels and shops. It is advisable to carry approximately **US\$200-300 cash** of your total spending money, in mixed denominations. Please note that US \$100 bills are often not accepted. **(Pound Sterling is also not readily exchanged.)**

Where to Exchange: San José and major towns. **ATM Availability:** ATMs are widely available though can be temperamental. Generally accept Cirrus and Maestro, Visa or Mastercard.

Credit Card Acceptance: In major restaurants. **Travellers Cheques:** Travellers Cheques are not always easy to exchange. US\$ Travellers

cheques can usually be changed on Days 3, 4, 10 and 11.

Additional Information: US\$ bills must be clean and not have any nicks or tears.

Up-to-date information re: global exchange rates can be obtained at <http://www.xe.com>

Local Payment

Payable in **U.S. Dollars cash only**, to Explore tour leader at the start of the tour.

Meal Plan

Local Food and Drink: 12 breakfasts, 3 lunches and 2 dinners are included on this trip; please be prepared to pay for all other meals. Approximate meal costs are given below:

	UK	Costa Rica
Coffee/tea	£1.20	US\$0.70
Soft Drink	0.80	1.00
Bottle of Beer	2.50	2.00
Breakfast	3.50	5.00
2 Course Meal*	10.00	8.00
3 Course Meal**	18.00	18.00

*Cheap local fare in a small cafe or restaurant.

**Typical food in a simple, reasonably comfortable mid-range restaurant.

Some restaurants may charge a 23% service charge.

Tipping

Local Staff: In this area, tipping is a recognised part of life. Some local staff will look to members of the group for recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly, you should allow US\$35 for group tipping. 10% is expected in restaurants.

Tour Leader: At your discretion you might also consider tipping your tour leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Other Sightseeing

The following excursions are usually available and may be booked and paid for through your tour leader during your trip. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants.

TURRIALBA Full day Whitewater rafting US\$65; Half day US\$45; Visit to Serpenterium US\$12; Finca visit local farm and dinner US\$10; Catie US\$15 (inc. guide).

TORTUGUERO Turtle watching (in season) US\$20; Bird/wildlife watching tour US\$15.

ARENAL Hot springs US\$19 (US\$32 with dinner); Walk in NP (1.5 hrs) US\$10; Waterfall walk US\$7; Safari float US\$45; Caño Negro excursion US\$52; Rafting US\$70.

MONTEVERDE Canopy bridges US\$20; Night walk in Reserve US\$15; Canopy zip wires US\$40; Butterfly garden US\$9; Orchid gardens US\$7; Eco Farm US\$7; Frog Pools US\$9; Coffee tour US\$25; Cheese tour US\$8.

MANUEL ANTONIO; Boat trip around NP US\$55; Wildlife guide US\$15 (based on 6 pax).

Booking a Single Room

All of our tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. On this particular tour we are pleased to be able to offer customers the option of pre-booking a guaranteed single room for each night of the tour.

EXPLORE ACCOMMODATION RATINGS : The following key is intended as a guide to the type of accommodation listed for each night stop. We stress that standards may vary and reserve the right to make changes as necessary without warning.

Hotels / Pensions / Lodges

H+ : Usually twin bedded rooms, normally with private facilities. Local grading 2/3/4 star.

H : Usually twin bedded rooms, sometimes 3-4 bedded rooms may have to be used. Normally with shared facilities. Local grading 1/2/3 star.

Local Style Accommodation

L+ : Usually twin bedded rooms, may be some 3-4 bedded. Normally shared facilities.

L : Could be twin bedded but more usually multiple share or dorm style, sometimes mixed sex, sleeping arrangements. Normally shared facilities.

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PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Seasonal Climate

Costa Rica has a tropical climate with high temperature humidity and rainfall. The average temperature is 21°C in the highlands and variable in the lowlands. The rainy season is from May to November and the summer from December to April, but it does still tend to rain, usually in short bursts. Bear in mind that Costa Rica has 12 microclimates and weather can vary significantly in one day.

Up-to-date information on the weather worldwide can be found at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather>.

Visa Requirements

UK, CAN, USA, NZ and AUS citizens do not require a visa for a stay up to 30 days in Costa Rica. Other nationalities should consult their travel agent or consular office.

Please note that your flights may transit the United States, therefore please check the latest advice on entry requirements with your nearest US Embassy or Consulate. For UK see <http://www.usembassy.org.uk/>

Vaccinations & Protection

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, infectious hepatitis and polio. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria.

Special Note: Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.

Further information regarding vaccinations for travel to this country can be found at www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk and from your local healthcare provider.

Electric Supply and Plugs

For comprehensive information regarding voltages and plug types in use in the countries visited, we recommend you check the website <http://www.kropla.com>

Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory for all bookings. You must take your policy document with you on tour as your tour leader will ask to see this at the start of the trip. Your documentation must state in writing that you are the named policyholder and that the cover is valid for your period of travel. Your policy document must also indicate that you have medical expenses and emergency repatriation cover and a 24-hour contact telephone number for your Insurance Company must be shown on your documentation in case of emergency. If you are unable to provide all this information at the start of the trip your tour leader will ask you to purchase an Explore Policy. If you have purchased Explore Insurance you should carry the Master Certificate leaflet with you, which outlines the conditions of the policy together with a copy of your Confirmation Invoice, which is your proof of purchase of insurance.

PACKING FOR YOUR TRIP

A complete list of clothing and personal gear is contained in Explore's '**General Information booklet**', available only after a booking has been accepted. Here we make a few specific recommendations with regard to your tour.

Luggage: One main piece of luggage and a daysac. Total allowance: **44lbs /20kgs**. Remember, you are expected to carry your own baggage – don't overload yourself. **You will also need a smaller bag for 2 days in Tortuguero.**

Clothing: If travelling between May-October pack essentially for '**Hot Conditions**'. Pack as for '**All Tours**' if travelling at other times. Lightweight clothing is essential in mid-summer though a warmer sweater is advisable for cooler evenings in the highlands. A good waterproof is essential, and you could consider waterproof trousers. The jungle lowlands are hot and muggy, and it can rain at any time of year. Long trousers and long-sleeved shirts are recommended on jungle walks.

Footwear: Lightweight trail/walking boots for jungle walks, comfortable shoes/trainers and sandals. In the rainy season waterproof boots are recommended.

Equipment: We recommend a sunhat, sunscreen, a small umbrella, a torch, insect repellent, a travel adaptor and a waterbottle. Binoculars are very useful for bird and animal spotting.

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