



Hidden Costa Rica

Rafting, hiking, zip lines, and some of the best wildlife viewing in the country are highlights of this trip that combines Costa Rica's most popular destinations with off-the-beaten-path locations

Costa Rica is the ecological gem of Latin America. With almost one-third of its land protected in parks and preserves, this oasis for nature lovers and eco-travelers is a natural wonderland of cloud forests, cascading rivers, exotic jungles and animals, beaches, and towering volcanoes.

Escape with Aventouras and experience the real Costa Rica. Raft world-class whitewater on the remote Pacuare River before taking a water taxi to Tortuguero National Park for wildlife viewing. Head north to the remote Volcan Tenorio for a hike, stopping at the zip lines and hot springs near Arenal volcano on the way. And if you need some beach time there is an option to extend the trip for a couple days to relax on the beautiful beaches of the Nicoya Peninsula, with options to dive, snorkel, surf, or simply enjoy the surf.

Day 1: Arrive in San Jose and transfer to the Costa Verde Inn in Escazu

We meet at the airport in San Jose, Costa Rica's bustling capital, and transfer to the Costa Verde Inn on the outskirts of the quiet suburb of Escazu. The inn is surrounded by vegetation, has a small pool and open patio, and is a short walk from the middle of Escazu, close to several restaurants and shops. It's a great place to relax throughout the day.

If you have time in the afternoon, you may wish to visit one of San Jose's superb museums or the INBioParque in Santo Domingo with its exhibits of Costa Rican ecology and national parks. For those looking to relax and unwind, opt to simply lounge by the swimming pool.

For everyone who arrives early enough we'll gather for a welcome dinner in town this evening.

Day 2: Pacuare River

Today we begin the two-day trip on the Pacuare River, called one of the top five white water rivers in the world by National Geographic. The Pacuare runs through jungle-clad gorges in a protected forest. There are no roads, bridges, or towns along the stretch of the river, just a few native dwellings and small eco-lodges. We'll get our feet wet in the Pacuare on our way to the rustic luxury of the Pacuare Lodge, spending about two hours on the river today, and running most of the river tomorrow.

We'll start with an early departure, around 6 am, from our hotel. We'll then drive about 2 hours to breakfast on a veranda overlooking the countryside. After a short drive and a kilometer downhill walk to the river, we'll reach our put-in on the Pacuare River. There we'll receive our safety talk and learn the paddling commands that will allow us to navigate the class II, III and IV rapids to come.

Our Tico guides will have us on the river around 10 am, and we'll immediately practice our paddling skills in a few class II and II+ rapids. After stopping at a small waterfall and swimming hole along the river, we'll arrive at the Pacuare Lodge in time to be greeted with fresh-squeezed lemonade and a smiling welcome before our lunch.

The Pacuare Lodge has been carved out of the jungle by a long-time Costa Rican river guide and his all-Tico staff. The Lodge features a main open-air dining hall and upstairs bar, plenty of comfortable open spaces to read and chat, and simple yet elegant cabins spaced around the manicured grounds. After lunch options include hiking to a small waterfall for a swim with a guide who will show us the plants along the way, or a canopy zip line (but remember, we have a spectacular zip line later in the trip). Some guests prefer to simply enjoy the view from the lodge deck with a book or journal. The food is excellent—salads, pasta, fish, steaks, traditional fare like gallo pinto and fresh fruit, homebaked breads and desserts—so guests have to decide which is better—the food or the view? Enjoy a drink from the bar or explore the lodge's stone wine cellar for a special selection with your dinner.

Day 3: Pacuare River

After our warm-up on the river yesterday, today we'll spend more time on the river, with many bigger rapids. We'll have an optional birding walk at 6:15 am, followed by a leisurely breakfast. We will be on the river by 10 am, immediately

getting into a series of class III and IV rapids. We'll do a total of 18 river miles between the two days, with about 14 miles today. Around noon we'll stop for a very short walk up to another waterfall and swimming hole (a theme on this trip), back on the river for more fun rapids, and then stop for a picnic lunch at a site provided by the local people. After lunch we'll have about an hour and half left on the river, including one of the most narrow and beautiful stretches of the river where you can let your raft drift under cascading waterfalls or jump in and let the river carry you gently along for a time. At the 4 pm take-out there are changing rooms, a small bar, and a trip photographer will be showing pictures of our trip, available to purchase on a CD.

After changing into dry clothes we'll drive about 45 minutes to our hotel for the night, the Suerre, in the town of Guapiles. The Hotel Suerre is a hotel popular with Ticos for its Olympic size swimming pool, tennis courts, and fitness center. It has a formal restaurant, but after a full day on the river and a hot shower most guests prefer a relaxed dinner at the poolside bar before turning in.

Day 4: Transfer to Tortuguero National Park

Today we'll have a late morning departure (around 10:00 am) to give you time for a swim or a long breakfast. We will also include time for a half hour stop in small city of Guapiles in case anyone needs cash or other items before going to Tortuguero and the Caribbean coast. The village of Tortuguero, surrounded by the national park and contiguous Barro Colorado Wildlife Refuge, has restaurants and stores with basic amenities, but little else. There is no ATM, and not all stores take credit cards. The stop in Guapiles will also allow us to pick up a snack to take on the drive or boat.

After a short break in Guapiles, we'll drive about 1.5 hours to the boat launch, at La Pavona. La Pavona is a bit of a mystery spot—known to the locals who take the public boat to Tortuguero, but not to most other people, including some Ticos. The road is rough and appears to be going deeper and deeper into banana plantations and cattle fields before arriving at the simple boat launch. There is a small shop there with drinks and snacks. At La Pavona local Ticos mix casually with the few travelers taking this unique public travel option.

The public boat leaves at 1:30. We'll climb aboard and for an hour-plus meander down the canal and rivers towards the town and park. Although we'll pass some areas with excellent birds and wildlife, this is a public boat that isn't likely to stop. Don't worry though; we'll have plenty of chances to see wildlife the next day in Tortuguero.

Upon arrival in the village of Tortuguero, the boat will take us directly to the dock and waterside veranda of the Casa Marbella, our home for the next two nights. We'll have time to explore town, walk the beach, visit the Caribbean Conservation Corporation and learn about the sea turtles and how they nest on Tortuguero, or even hike the trail that starts at the national park visitor center. Wander the out-of-the-way walkways of the village (no roads in Tortuguero!) to get an appreciation for the lives of the natives and stop for a coffee or pastry at the bakery next to Casa Marbella. Dinner will be at a restaurant of our choosing in town: Miriams, Miss Junie's, or maybe the Buddha Café.

The Casa Marbella is a small, simple B&B run by a Canadian biologist, with a back deck looking out over the water—the perfect place from which we can explore the park and the town.

Day 5: Tortuguero National Park wildlife viewing and hike

The birds and wildlife are most active early in the morning, so today we'll wake up on their schedule. The boat for our wildlife-viewing trip will leave around 5:50 am, so we'll have a wake-up knock around 5:25. Coffee will be available at 5:30 at Casa Marbella, but breakfast will wait for our return. The bakery next door opens at 5 am where you can snack on a pastry or chicken pie to hold you over.

Darryl Loth, the biologist who runs the Casa Marbella, has been showing guests the birds and wildlife of the national park for over a decade, and is adept at pointing out animals where the rest of us would only see a clump of leaves. The advantage to looking for wildlife along the rivers of Tortuguero is that often the animals are much closer than we'll ever see them from a hiking trail. Along the river there is an unobstructed view of the canopy overhanging the water, giving us some of the best wildlife viewing in the country. Trips through the park often see monkeys, sloths, river otters, caimans, and many species of birds.

After our three hour guided boat tour of the park, we'll have breakfast on the deck of Casa Marbella, and then return to the park on foot. We'll take a water taxi to the base of the hill that reaches to the highest point in the park, the remnant of an extinct volcano. Here, with another guide, we'll see the vegetation up close, as well as have another chance to see monkeys and other animals. On this trail we'll find that the plants and insects of the tropical wet forests are as fascinating as the animals.

We'll be back by mid-afternoon, in time for a stroll around town, walk along the beach, dip in the ocean, or nap on the deck, before dinner in the evening.

Day 6: Transfer to Arenal, hike and hot springs

Today we'll leave the remote Tortuguero region for the more mountainous and visited Volcan Arenal area. This region provides many amenities that guests enjoy, including zip lines, good hiking trails, and our favorite hot springs in Latin America.

After a quick early morning breakfast we'll leave Tortuguero heading to the La Fortuna and Volcano Arenal region. We will arrive in La Fortuna around midday where we can make a quick stop for cash, water or any other items we need. Outside La Fortuna we'll go for a quick hike to a powerful and beautiful waterfall (la catarata). The hike is more like a long series of steps down to the falls and pool. After the heat of Tortuguero, the temperature at this elevation may feel cool, but it's worth getting in the water.

Tonight we'll be staying at the Arenal Observatory Lodge, originally built in 1987 as a Smithsonian Institute scientific research station. The lodge and manicured grounds are located in a private nature reserve within Arenal National Park, protected from lava by the deep gorge of the Agua Caliente River and with commanding views of the volcano and nearby Lake Arenal. It is about a forty-minute drive from the town of La Fortuna. We'll arrive in time to walk some of the trails on the property before heading out again this evening for a treat—the Hidalgo Family Hot Springs. A series of pools, cascades and waterfalls are set into the forest, with a limited number of visitors at any time. There is a spring-side bar that makes an excellent frozen hand-squeezed lime daiquiri. After a soak in the springs we'll make our way over to the restaurant for dinner, before driving back to the Observatory Lodge for the night.

Day 7: Zip lines, transfer to La Carolina Lodge

The Observatory Lodge is perfectly situated for our first activity today—the canopy zip lines. We'll have time for a complete breakfast, a walk on the lodge trails, or even a soak in the lodge pool and hot tub before a 9:15 am departure for our zip line reservation. The SkyTrek consists of six zip lines of varying speeds and lengths—some as long as 2,400 feet, one over 600 feet above the ground and one where zip liners can reach a speed of up to 42 mph! The tram to the start of the first line takes us through the canopy slowly, allowing us our first view of the tree tops and wild orchids, as well as views of the volcano if it's not covered by clouds. Travelers have seen and heard rocks tumbling down the face of the volcano from our perch in the trees.

After about three hours at the zip lines, we'll travel to La Carolina Lodge, on the slopes of Volcan Tenorio, outside Volcan Tenorio national park and the town of Bijagua. We'll arrive early enough for a short hike along the river and through the ranch pastures, or for a swim in the river and a soak in the "hot tub" (a stone pool along the river, heated by an innovative wood stove).

La Carolina Lodge is one of our favorite lodges anywhere in Latin America and a truly authentic Costa Rican experience. It sits on 170 acres, a portion of which is riverfront, and exudes a comfortable and friendly rustic feel. The ranch is home to an abundance of indigenous plant and animal life, which can be viewed while walking the grounds or simply relaxing on the deck overlooking the river. Meals are prepared outdoors on a wood-fired cookstove by an attentive local Spanish-speaking staff, and served family style on the open-air veranda. After dinner, retire to one of the many hearth-side rocking chairs to enjoy a warm fire, or back to the hot tub!

Day 8: Volcan Tenorio National Park and Rio Celeste hike

Today we'll head out for what the Lonely Planet guidebook calls "one of the finest short hikes in Costa Rica." The only disagreement we have with that assessment is that the hike isn't all that short. The walk through this lush cloud forest is a few kilometers in each direction, with wonderful stops and sights along the way; the beautiful Rio Celeste waterfall, the viewpoint overlooking Volcan Tenorio and the surrounding jungle, and the spot where two chemically-charged rivers combine to create a milky blue hue that is the signature of Rio Celeste. The hike takes a good four hours and is fairly challenging.

Depending on our departure time, we'll either bring along a picnic lunch or, more likely, have lunch when we return. We'll have time in the afternoon to walk the grounds or explore them on horseback, or to enjoy the river, hot tub, or hammocks.

Day 9: Transfer to airport in San Jose and flights home

On this final day we'll transfer to the airport in San Jose for our afternoon flights home (flights from San Jose must depart no earlier than 1 pm). Because the airport is several hours away, we will likely have time for quick coffee at La Carolina before leaving the lodge.

Hidden Costa Rica Trip Details

✧ The itinerary price of \$1998 per person includes:

- All lodging—8 nights
- All transfers from to/from airports and hotels, with private English-speaking driver to the Pacuare River, from the Pacuare to Guapiles, from Guapiles to La Pavona, the boat to Tortuguero, transportation from Tortuguero to Arenal, private driver to Bijagua.
- Activities: Pacuare River rafting, morning birding/wildlife trip at Tortuguero National Park, access to the La Fortuna waterfall, zip lines and hot springs near Arenal, hiking Volcan Tenorio National Park.
- A guide throughout the trip, plus additional guides for rafting, hiking, and wildlife tours.
- All meals while at La Carolina Lodge and Pacuare River Jungle Lodge, dinner at the Hidalgo Family Hot Springs, and breakfast en route to the Pacuare River, at the Suerre Hotel, Casa Marbella and Arenal Observatory Lodge.

✧ The itinerary price does not include:

- International airfare and taxes
- Departure taxes (\$26.00 per person, may be included in your airline ticket)
- Meals not detailed above
- Alcoholic beverages
- Extras in hotels (laundry, phone calls, room service, etc.)
- Gratuities

✧ Arrival

Guests should fly into San Jose and will be met at the international airport in San Jose. You may arrive any time on the first day, but keep in mind that we will have an early departure the following morning.

✧ Departure

Departures on the last day from San Jose must be **after** 1pm to allow time to get to San Jose. Aventouras does not book international flights but we can help with flight options or refer guests to our partner travel agency which will arrange and book your flight.

🌿 Descriptions of lodges

- Cost Verde Inn, Escazu (www.costaverdeinn.com): The Costa Verde Inn is located in the quiet San Jose suburb of Escazu. The inn has an open-air dining area for morning coffee and breakfast. It is close to the airport, convenient for our first night in Costa Rica. The Inn is about a 15 minute walk from the center of Escazu, and the roads can be a bit confusing so we recommend asking for directions at the front desk or having the front desk call a cab for you. A cab to or from the middle of Escazu will cost only a few dollars. There are several good restaurants that the friendly and English-speaking front desk staff can recommend. (There are also several American chain restaurants that you will pass as you enter Escazu.)
- The Pacuare River Jungle Lodge (www.junglelodgcostarica.com) manages to be both rustic and lavish (picture gourmet meals by candlelight in a place where candles aren't used just to set the mood, they're used because there's no electricity). It is an unforgettable place to spend your second night in Costa Rica, in one of their comfortable bungalows in the forest along the river, far away from any towns or people.
- We choose the Suerre Hotel in Guapiles (www.suerre.com) mostly for convenience. It's a popular place with Ticos for its big pool and tennis courts: think country club for locals. After a full day on the Pacuare we'll be more interested in a convenient, on-the-way hotel instead of driving out of our way, given that it's only for one night.
- Casa Marbella (<http://casamarbella.tripod.com>) is the type of lodge we really like. It's a small, simple B&B run by a Canadian biologist, with a back deck looking out over the water. It's in town, so we'll be able to walk everywhere to enjoy the local restaurants, shops, and people.
- Arenal Observatory Lodge (www.arenalobservatorylodge.com) was originally built in 1987 as a Smithsonian Institute scientific research station. The lodge is located in a private nature reserve within Arenal National Park, protected from lava by the deep gorge of the Agua Caliente River and with commanding views of the volcano. It is about a forty minute drive from the town of La Fortuna.
- La Carolina Lodge (www.lacarolinlodge.com) is situated on 170 acres, a portion of which is riverfront. The ranch is home to an abundance of indigenous plant and animal life, which can be viewed while walking the

grounds or simply relaxing on the deck overlooking the river. La Carolina Lodge is truly a place to relax and enjoy the natural beauty of Costa Rica.

For those considering a trip extension contact us and we can arrange a couple relaxing days on the beach, a trip to the Osa Peninsula, or several other exciting destinations.

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Additional notes about your trip

- Meeting in the airport on the first day: You will find your driver or guide upon leaving the airport's international terminal; he will be holding a sign with your name on it.
- Money: US dollars and/or credit cards are accepted in many places, and we suggest taking out a few colones at an ATM in the airport or in Escazu on our first or second day (be sure to know your ATM PIN by numbers and not just letters!). The exchange rate is roughly 500 colones to one dollar. If you bring US cash, we suggest you bring bills no larger than \$20, including some \$10, \$5, and \$1 bills, and make sure they are crisp and clean with no tears or folds. (Your bank will provide clean bills on request.) It may also be helpful to have a number of one dollar bills to easily cover gratuities. You will have access to ATMs in Guapiles and the Arenal area, but not in Tortuguero or at La Carolina Lodge.

General Information, Questions & Answers

What weather conditions can I expect?

The dry season in Costa Rica runs from December to April, and is preferred by many tourists. The early part of the rainy, or “green” season, from May to August, is also a good time. Most days have clear mornings with showers in the afternoon, fewer tourists fill the hotels and restaurants, and the landscape is a verdant green. September, October and early November are the wettest part of the rainy season and are wetter than most people prefer.

Although Costa Rica is a small country, it has significant variation in climate. The Caribbean side is generally wetter than the rest of the country, and the northwest part of the country, on and above the Nicoya Peninsula, is the driest. The region around Arenal Volcano is about average in terms of rain, but somewhat paradoxically, the volcano is more likely to be seen on the clear mornings of the rainy season than during the dry season, when the top is often shrouded in clouds.

Regarding accommodations...

While we plan to use the accommodations specified in this itinerary, changes are occasionally required due to availability of facilities, group size, etc. We recognize that most guests need detailed accommodations information to leave behind with relatives, etc. We’re more than happy to provide this when it is finalized – typically at least 30 days prior to departure.

Passport and visa information

A passport with an expiration date that is at least 90 days after your arrival date is required for travel to Costa Rica. No other visas or shots are required. As with any international travel, we suggest you consult the Center for Disease Control website for guidelines (<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/costa-rica.aspx>) as well as speak to a health care provider about any recommended shots based on personal health history. You should schedule this discussion 4-6 weeks ahead of your departure to allow any needed shots to take effect before your trip.

Cancellation policy

If you must cancel your trip, you’re required to notify us in writing. We will calculate your refund on the day we receive your written cancellation. For all cancellations, we will refund you the cost of your trip less the following per person charges:

- 121 or more days before trip departure: The deposit less \$350 is refundable.
- 91-120 days before trip departure: None of the deposit is refunded.
- 61-90 days before trip departure: 50% of the trip payment is refunded.
- 0-60 days before trip departure: No refund is given.

Exceptions to these policies cannot be made for any reason, including weather or personal emergencies. We recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance. We provide information about travel insurance upon registration.

The Next Step...

How do I join this trip?

Call Aventouras at 800-930-2846 and a trip consultant will reserve your space(s). Your travel agent can also book your trip at no extra cost and provide other helpful assistance.

Special requests

If you have any special dietary needs or any special request that will make your trip more enjoyable, please be sure to notify your trip consultant or travel agent upon booking.

Leave the rest to us...

Before you go, we will send you a pre-departure package, including your reservation payment receipt and confirmation, detailed information about the area, a packing list, suggestions for preparing for your trip, a guest questionnaire, information on pre/post trip arrangements, and a liability release agreement.

Unsurpassed value

We offer the highest quality trips at the best value. Our itineraries include most meals, transportation (in-country flights) and entrance fees. If you find a trip of equal quality that matches our itinerary and inclusions at a lower fare within 30 days of booking with us, we'll refund the difference. A simple guarantee that assures you the best trip at the best fare!

We're always improving!

This itinerary details this trip's planned activities, routes, accommodations, departure and conclusion times. However, we're constantly seeking new opportunities to enhance this program and your experience. Our actual activities and sites may vary due to season, special events, or weather. Therefore, we reserve the right to alter the itinerary since unforeseen circumstances that mandate change may arise. Naturally, we will keep you up-to-date on any changes that may affect your arrival or departure times.

Travel protection

To make your trip with Aventouras even more carefree, we strongly recommend the purchase of a travel insurance plan. Offering comprehensive coverage and peace of mind, a travel insurance plan is designed to protect you in case of trip cancellation for medical reasons, travel delays, medical expenses, accidental death, lost baggage and medical evacuation. We're happy to supply information about travel insurance coverage for you, so please contact us at 800-930-2846.

How do I book airfare for this trip?

Book online, call your travel agent or call us at 800-930-2846 for assistance and suggestions. We are familiar with most flight options from the U.S. and can give you suggestions as well as an idea of usual fares. We can also help you with pre- and post-trip lodging ideas if you wish to arrive early or stay longer.

To book this trip:

Call us at 800-930-2846, book online at www.aventouras.com, or email us at info@aventouras.com