ROAD TRIP · COSTA RICA

Birdwatching

From the lowlands of Sarapiquí to the cloud forest and the mountains: toucans, hummingbirds, macaws and the quetzal.

Length	12 days, 11 nights
Distance	630 km, 6 driving days
Behind the wheel	14 h 10 min
Travellers	2, 1 room, 1 car
Hotels	Comfort: a good hotel (3 stars)
Flights	Amsterdam – San José (SJO), San José (SJO) – Amsterdam

CONTENTS

Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí	Days 1–3	**6**
La Fortuna	Days 4–5	**8**
Monteverde	Days 6–8	**10**
San Gerardo de Dota	Days 9–10	**12**
Alajuela	Day 11	**14**

Day by day

DAY	DATE	NIGHT	KM	DRIVE	°C
1		Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí	100	2 h	
2		Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí			
3		Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí			
4		La Fortuna	80	1 h 10 min	
5		La Fortuna			
6		Monteverde	110	2 h 40 min	
7		Monteverde			
8		Monteverde			
9		San Gerardo de Dota	230	5 h 20 min	
10		San Gerardo de Dota			
11		Alajuela	110	2 h 50 min	
12		Flight home from SJO	10	10 min	

630 km · 14 h 10 min behind the wheel · on average 100 km a driving day

Kilometres and drive times by road (OSRM, OpenStreetMap), without stops: plan generously.

The route



Map: Natural Earth (public domain) · roads © OpenStreetMap contributors

ON THE ROAD

Day 1	Land at San José (SJO), drive to Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí · About 100 km, 2 h
Day 4	Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí, drive to La Fortuna · About 80 km, 1 h 10 min
Day 6	La Fortuna, drive to Monteverde · About 110 km, 2 h 40 min
Day 9	Monteverde, drive to San Gerardo de Dota · About 230 km, 5 h 20 min
Day 11	San Gerardo de Dota, drive to Alajuela · About 110 km, 2 h 50 min
Day 12	Alajuela to San José airport (SJO), fly home to Amsterdam · About 10 km, 10 min

Well prepared

Passport and entry

Dutch and Belgian travellers need no visa for a holiday of up to 180 days. Your passport must be valid for the whole trip on arrival, and you show a return ticket at immigration. There is no ESTA or form beforehand; the departure tax is included in your air fare.
nederlandwereldwijd.nl/reisadvies/costa-rica

Driving licence and 4x4

Your Dutch or Belgian driving licence is valid for 90 days. For Monteverde, Santa Teresa, Drake Bay and the Nicoya coast road you want a 4x4: dirt roads, potholes and in the green season rivers to drive through. The compulsory liability insurance (SLI/TPL) is always bought from the rental company, even if your credit card gives cover.

On the road

Count on 40 to 50 km an hour on average: mountain roads, lorries and villages. Don't drive after dark; it is dark by six, all year round. Waze knows every road and warns of closures. Never leave anything visible in the car, not even for a moment.

Money

The currency is the colón, but almost everywhere takes dollars and credit cards. Bring a few small dollar notes for tips and parking. Restaurants add 10% service to the bill; an extra tip for a good nature guide (about $10 a person) is customary.

When to go

The dry season runs from December to April: sunny on the Pacific side and in Guanacaste. May to November is the green season, with sunny mornings and afternoon showers, quieter and cheaper; September and October are the wettest months, except on the Caribbean coast, where they are the driest.

Parks and entry fees

The national parks cost foreigners about $12 to $18 a person a day. For Manuel Antonio, Poás, Irazú and Corcovado you buy your ticket online beforehand from SINAC; Manuel Antonio is closed on Mondays.
serviciosenlinea.sinac.go.cr

Health

No vaccinations are required when you come from Europe. Protect yourself against mosquitoes (dengue), especially on the Caribbean coast. Tap water is drinkable in most places; ask in remote areas.

Packing list

- [ ] Passport (valid for the whole trip)
- [ ] Driving licence and credit card in the driver's name
- [ ] Travel and cancellation insurance
- [ ] Confirmations: flights, car, hotels, park tickets
- [ ] Rain jacket or poncho, even in the dry season
- [ ] Walking shoes that may get wet
- [ ] Insect repellent with DEET
- [ ] Reef-safe sunscreen
- [ ] Binoculars for birds and sloths
- [ ] A jumper for Monteverde and the volcanoes
- [ ] Plug adapter for type A/B (120 volts)

DON'T FORGET



DAYS 1–3

Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí Heredia

Toucans and poison dart frogs at La Selva

Land at San José (SJO), drive to Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí: about 100 km, 2 h

3 nights

DON'T MISS

- La Selva biological station
- Rafting on the Sarapiquí
- Chocolate tour at a cacao farm

With an extra night

With an extra night: rafting on the Sarapiquí, or a second early bird walk.

EXCURSIONS

- ☐ La Selva bird walk — roughly €50 a person
- ☐ Sarapiquí rafting — roughly €80 a person
- ☐ Chocolate tour — roughly €30 a person

HOTEL

Name, address, confirmation number:

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DAYS 4–5

La Fortuna Alajuela

The cone of Arenal volcano

Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí, drive to La Fortuna: about 80 km, 1 h 10 min

2 nights

DON'T MISS

- Lava trails in Arenal National Park
- La Fortuna waterfall
- Hanging bridges through the rainforest
- Hot springs at the foot of the volcano

With an extra night

With an extra night: canyoning or rafting on the Balsa, or a day along Lake Arenal.

EXCURSIONS

- [ ] Arenal hanging bridges guided tour — roughly €60 a person
- [ ] Tabacón hot springs — roughly €90 a person
- [ ] Zipline over the rainforest — roughly €80 a person

HOTEL

- [ ] Alojamientos N&S · 3★
  La Fortuna de San Carlos
- [ ] Cabañas Litos · 3★
  Av. 331
- [ ] Jarabacoa Family Hostel · 3★
  san isidro de peñas blancas
- [ ] Natural Green Lodge · 3★
- [ ] Fortuna Retreat · 3★
  C. Don Vital Castro

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DAYS 6–8

Monteverde Puntarenas

Walking in the cloud forest

La Fortuna, drive to Monteverde: about 110 km, 2 h 40 min

3 nights

DON'T MISS

- Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve
- Hanging bridges through the canopy
- Hummingbirds at the Hummingbird Café

MONTEVERDE · DAYS 6–8

With an extra night

With an extra night: the Santa Elena reserve, or a coffee and chocolate tour.

EXCURSIONS

- ☐ Cloud forest with a nature guide — roughly €50 a person
- ☐ Cloud forest night walk — roughly €30 a person
- ☐ Monteverde zipline — roughly €80 a person

HOTEL

- ☐ El Nido Lodge · 3★
  50m este de gasolinera 606
- ☐ ÉWA Homes Monteverde · 3★
- ☐ Finca Aquarius · 3★
- ☐ The Green Tree Lodge · 3★
  60109
- ☐ Villa Golondrina · 3★
  Calle los Leitón

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DAYS 9–10

San Gerardo de Dota San José

The quetzal in the oak forests

Monteverde, drive to San Gerardo de Dota: about 230 km, 5 h 20 min

2 nights

DON'T MISS

- Looking for quetzals at sunrise
- The Savegre waterfall
- The top of Cerro de la Muerte

SAN GERARDO DE DOTA · DAYS 9–10

With an extra night

With an extra night: trout fishing on the Savegre, or hiking in Los Quetzales.

EXCURSIONS

- [ ] Quetzal tour with a guide — roughly €50 a person
- [ ] Highland bird walk — roughly €50 a person

HOTEL

- [ ] Entre Árboles Lodge · 3★
  San Gerardo de Dota, Chalet Amauleza
- [ ] Miriam'S Quetzals lodge · 3★
  san gerardo de dota 3 kilometros de la entrada principal en minimarket vista del cerro
- [ ] Hotel de Montaña Suria · 3★
  San Gerardo de Dota

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DAY 11

Alajuela Alajuela

Poás crater, an hour from the airport

San Gerardo de Dota, drive to Alajuela: about 110 km, 2 h 50 min

1 night

DON'T MISS

- Poás volcano crater
- La Paz waterfall gardens
- Coffee farm in the hills of Alajuela

With an extra night

With an extra night: La Paz waterfall gardens, or a day in San José with the Gold Museum and the Mercado Central.

EXCURSIONS

- [ ] Central Valley coffee tour — roughly €40 a person
- [ ] Poás volcano guided tour — roughly €80 a person

HOTEL

- [ ] Casa Cafetal Aeropuerto Two Bedrooms · 3★
  Paso Flores Calle 11
- [ ] Hotel Bamboo Aeropuerto · 3★
  Ave 1, Calles 9-11
- [ ] Las Carmelas, Airport Juan Santamaría, Alajuela, San José · 3★
  C. La Haya
- [ ] Hildas Bed and Breakfast · 3★
  Av 2 Alfaro Ruíz
- [ ] Hostal Casa Azul · 3★
  100 este de Correos de Costa Rica

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What it costs

DAY	PLACE	HOTEL	TOURS	CAR	TOTAL
1	Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí	€110	–	€70	**€180**
2	Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí	€110	–	€70	**€180**
3	Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí	€110	–	€70	**€180**
4	La Fortuna	€130	–	€70	**€200**
5	La Fortuna	€130	–	€70	**€200**
6	Monteverde	€110	–	€70	**€180**
7	Monteverde	€110	–	€70	**€180**
8	Monteverde	€110	–	€70	**€180**
9	San Gerardo de Dota	€130	–	€70	**€200**
10	San Gerardo de Dota	€130	–	€70	**€200**
11	Alajuela	€110	–	€70	**€180**
12	Flight home from SJO	–	–	€70	**€70**

Flights	€1,800
Hotels	€1,290
Excursions	€0
Car hire	€780
Total	**€3,870**
	€1,940 a person

An estimate to plan with (prices of 2026-10): hotels, the ticked excursions, car hire and flights. No fuel or meals.

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About this booklet

Made on rondreis.expert. Your trip is still there, to change and print again: costa-rica.roundtrip.expert/tours/birds-of-costa-rica/

PHOTOS

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Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí	Great kiskadee in Costa Rica 01.jpg · Bernard Gagnon, CC0
La Fortuna	nature/la-fortuna-waterfall_01_l.jpg · Press photo
Monteverde	nature/group-birdwatching-closeup-curi-cancha-reserve-monteverde.jpg.webp · Press photo
San Gerardo de Dota	animals/2016_06-JUNIO-03_CC_ICT_RUTA-AVES_DOTA_0196-4500x3003.jpg · Press photo
Alajuela	Piaya cayana, Costa Rica.jpg · Hobbyfotowiki, CC0

MAP AND TYPE

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