

ROAD TRIP · COSTA RICA

The grand tour in 21 days

21 days · Rincón de la Vieja — Alajuela

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The grand tour in 21 days

Three weeks from Liberia to San José: volcanoes, Río Celeste, Arenal, the cloud forest, the beaches of Santa Teresa, Manuel Antonio, the whales of Uvita and the quetzal.

Length	21 days, 20 nights
Distance	1,100 km, 10 driving days
Behind the wheel	25 h 40 min
Travellers	2, 1 room, 1 car
Hotels	Comfort: a good hotel (3 stars)
Flights	Amsterdam – Liberia (LIR), San José (SJO) – Amsterdam

CONTENTS

Rincón de la Vieja	Days 1–2	**6**
Bijagua	Days 3–4	**8**
La Fortuna	Days 5–7	**10**
Monteverde	Days 8–9	**12**
Santa Teresa	Days 10–12	**14**
Manuel Antonio	Days 13–14	**16**
Uvita	Days 15–17	**18**
San Gerardo de Dota	Days 18–19	**20**
Alajuela	Day 20	**22**

Day by day

DAY	DATE	NIGHT	KM	DRIVE	°C
1		Rincón de la Vieja	40	1 h	
2		Rincón de la Vieja			
3		Bijagua	50	2 h	
4		Bijagua			
5		La Fortuna	100	1 h 30 min	
6		La Fortuna			
7		La Fortuna			
8		Monteverde	110	2 h 40 min	
9		Monteverde			
10		Santa Teresa	180	4 h 10 min	
11		Santa Teresa			
12		Santa Teresa			
13		Manuel Antonio	320	6 h 40 min	
14		Manuel Antonio			
15		Uvita	70	1 h 30 min	
16		Uvita			
17		Uvita			
18		San Gerardo de Dota	110	3 h 10 min	
19		San Gerardo de Dota			
20		Alajuela	110	2 h 50 min	
21		Flight home from SJO	10	10 min	

1,100 km · 25 h 40 min behind the wheel · on average 110 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 Liberia (LIR), drive to Rincón de la Vieja · About 40 km, 1 h
Day 3	Rincón de la Vieja, drive to Bijagua · About 50 km, 2 h
Day 5	Bijagua, drive to La Fortuna · About 100 km, 1 h 30 min
Day 8	La Fortuna, drive to Monteverde · About 110 km, 2 h 40 min
Day 10	Monteverde, drive to Santa Teresa · About 180 km, 4 h 10 min
Day 13	Santa Teresa, drive to Manuel Antonio · About 320 km, 6 h 40 min
Day 15	Manuel Antonio, drive to Uvita · About 70 km, 1 h 30 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 1–2

Rincón de la Vieja Guanacaste

The mud pots and fumaroles of Rincón de la Vieja

Land at Liberia (LIR), drive to Rincón de la Vieja: about 40 km, 1 h

2 nights

DON'T MISS

- Las Pailas in the national park
- Oropéndola waterfall
- Hot springs and mud baths

With an extra night

With an extra night: tubing on the Río Negro, or on horseback through the dry forest.

EXCURSIONS

- ☐ Hot springs and mud bath — roughly €50 a person
- ☐ Zipline and river tubing — roughly €90 a person
- ☐ Horse ride through the dry forest — roughly €60 a person

HOTEL

Name, address, confirmation number:

NOTES



DAYS 3–4

Bijagua Alajuela

The sky-blue water of Río Celeste

Rincón de la Vieja, drive to Bijagua: about 50 km, 2 h

2 nights

DON'T MISS

- Río Celeste waterfall
- Los Teñideros, where the river turns blue
- Sloths in the gardens around Bijagua

With an extra night

With an extra night: tubing on the Río Celeste, or a night walk looking for frogs and tapirs.

EXCURSIONS

- ☐ Río Celeste guided hike — roughly €50 a person
- ☐ Night walk to see tapirs — roughly €40 a person

HOTEL

- ☐ Cabaña Montezion Bijagua · 3★
  800 Oeste Puesto G.A.R. Bijagua
- ☐ Paradise Rio Celeste 2 · 3★
  Bijagua Centro 50 mts este del Restaurante Poro lado derecho 1
- ☐ Yarumo Lodge Río Celeste Black Chalets · 3★
- ☐ Mei Tai Cacao Lodge · 3★
  Calle por Zapote
- ☐ Casitas Tenorio B&B · 3★
  3 km Sureste del Liceo

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DAYS 5–7

La Fortuna Alajuela

The cone of Arenal volcano

Bijagua, drive to La Fortuna: about 100 km, 1 h 30 min

3 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 8–9

Monteverde Puntarenas

Walking in the cloud forest

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

2 nights

DON'T MISS

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

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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Waves, yoga and sunsets

DAYS 10–12

Santa Teresa Puntarenas

Waves, yoga and sunsets

Monteverde, drive to Santa Teresa: about 180 km, 4 h 10 min

3 nights

DON'T MISS

- Santa Teresa beach
- Montezuma waterfall
- Cabo Blanco reserve

With an extra night

With an extra night: by boat to Tortuga Island, or a hike in Cabo Blanco.

EXCURSIONS

- [ ] Santa Teresa surf lesson — roughly €60 a person
- [ ] Tortuga Island boat trip — roughly €100 a person
- [ ] Yoga class — roughly €20 a person

HOTEL

- [ ] Seataya Oceanview Luxury Villas · 3★

NOTES



DAYS 13–14

Manuel Antonio Puntarenas

Sloths and monkeys above white bays

Santa Teresa, drive to Manuel Antonio: about 320 km, 6 h 40 min

2 nights

DON'T MISS

- Manuel Antonio National Park
- Espadilla beach
- Sunset over the Pacific

With an extra night

With an extra night: a catamaran along the coast, or kayaking in the Damas mangroves.

EXCURSIONS

- [ ] Manuel Antonio with a nature guide — roughly €60 a person
- [ ] Catamaran cruise with snorkelling — roughly €90 a person
- [ ] Mangrove kayak tour — roughly €70 a person

HOTEL

- [ ] Apto Cielo Azul · 3★
  Playa Manuel Antonio, 100 metro oeste entrada Parque Nacional
- [ ] Hotel Playa Espadilla · 3★
  Manuel Antonio 200 metros oeste del Parque Nacional
- [ ] Mango Moon Villa · 3★
  200 Oeste del Hotel La Mariposa
- [ ] Hotel Planeta Sano · 3★
  Hotel California Road
- [ ] Natural Pacific Suites, private family rooms · 3★
  https://goo.gl/maps/15WX22dzy1m2DbFbA

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DAYS 15–17

Uvita Puntarenas

Whales off the Whale's Tail

Manuel Antonio, drive to Uvita: about 70 km, 1 h 30 min

3 nights

DON'T MISS

- The Whale's Tail in Marino Ballena
- Uvita waterfall
- Caño Island by boat

With an extra night

With an extra night: diving or snorkelling at Caño Island, or the Nauyaca waterfalls.

EXCURSIONS

- [ ] Whale and dolphin watching — roughly €80 a person
- [ ] Caño Island snorkelling — roughly €110 a person
- [ ] Two-tank dive at Caño Island — roughly €160 a person

HOTEL

- [ ] Bambura Bahia Villas · 3★
  Bambura Bahia Uvita
- [ ] Ruca Lodge - Luxury Container Tiny Home Surrounded by Nature · 3★
  Calle San Josecito
- [ ] Apartamentos Equipados DMR #3 · 3★
  200 metro suroeste dela Pizzeria la fogata C. El Mariposario 1
- [ ] MADRE TERRA · 3★
  400 m este del Banco del Costa Rica y 150 m sur de cabinas Los Laureles
- [ ] Cedrela Beach Villas · 3★
  Camino a Playa Chamán

NOTES



DAYS 18–19

San Gerardo de Dota San José

The quetzal in the oak forests

Uvita, drive to San Gerardo de Dota: about 110 km, 3 h 10 min

2 nights

DON'T MISS

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

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

NOTES



DAY 20

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

NOTES

What it costs

DAY	PLACE	HOTEL	TOURS	CAR	TOTAL
1	Rincón de la Vieja	€120	–	€70	**€190**
2	Rincón de la Vieja	€120	–	€70	**€190**
3	Bijagua	€120	–	€70	**€190**
4	Bijagua	€120	–	€70	**€190**
5	La Fortuna	€130	–	€70	**€200**
6	La Fortuna	€130	–	€70	**€200**
7	La Fortuna	€130	–	€70	**€200**
8	Monteverde	€110	–	€70	**€180**
9	Monteverde	€110	–	€70	**€180**
10	Santa Teresa	€180	–	€70	**€250**
11	Santa Teresa	€180	–	€70	**€250**
12	Santa Teresa	€180	–	€70	**€250**
13	Manuel Antonio	€160	–	€70	**€230**
14	Manuel Antonio	€160	–	€70	**€230**
15	Uvita	€130	–	€70	**€200**
16	Uvita	€130	–	€70	**€200**
17	Uvita	€130	–	€70	**€200**
18	San Gerardo de Dota	€130	–	€70	**€200**
19	San Gerardo de Dota	€130	–	€70	**€200**
20	Alajuela	€110	–	€70	**€180**
21	Flight home from SJO	–	–	€70	**€70**

Flights	€1,800
Hotels	€2,710
Excursions	€0
Car hire	€1,370
Total	**€5,880**
	€2,940 a person

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

Notes

About this booklet

Made on rondreis.expert. Your trip is still there, to change and print again: costa-rica.roundtrip.expert/tours/grand-tour-21-days/

PHOTOS

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Rincón de la Vieja	nature/family-friends-base-of-waterfall-las-chorreras-hacienda-guachipelin.jpg · Press photo
Bijagua	Ruta 6 en Cuesta Los Pichardo (1).jpg · Cuban Boy, 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
Manuel Antonio	landscapes/manuel-antonio-national-park_03_l.jpg · Press photo
Uvita	beaches/Playa-Ventanas-Puntarenas-2.jpg · 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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THE ROUTE

Rincón de la Vieja (2) · Bijagua (2) · La Fortuna (3) · Monteverde (2) · Santa Teresa (3) · Manuel Antonio (2) · Uvita (3) · San Gerardo de Dota (2) · Alajuela (1)

Three weeks from Liberia to San José: volcanoes, Río Celeste, Arenal, the cloud forest, the beaches of Santa Teresa, Manuel Antonio, the whales of Uvita and the quetzal.

21 days · 20 nights · 1,100 km

rondreis.expert

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