Costa Rica Attractions

Considered one of the most bio-diverse regions in the world, Costa Rican attractions are abundant with national parks, biological reserves and protected natural areas sure to fascinate and enchant whoever experiences them.

There is such an incredible array of Costa Rica activities to enjoy with minimum impact on the environment, such as horseback riding, hiking, exploring, zip-lining, bird watching and many more, here are just a few Costa Rica travel tours and vacation ideas to tantalize your adventurous taste buds.

National Parks & Volcanoes

Santa Rosa National Park
This park is 35 km north of Liberia and the average annual temperature is 28°C. Santa Rosa is a protected dry forest, set apart by the distinct variation of foliage between the rainy and dry seasons. You will find 115 animal species, such as the beautiful white-tailed deer, howler monkey, white-faced monkey, and coatis, as well as many species of bird. And in the coastal zone the various mangroves predominate, including red mangrove and other Costa Rican vegetation. The park also features the Casona de Santa Rosa Museum., part of the Guanacaste Conservation Area.

Rincón de la Vieja National Park
This well-known National Park surrounds one of the most significant volcanoes in Costa Rica, the Rincón de la Vieja Volcano. The park consists of two regions: Las Pailas, located 25 km from Liberia and 10 km of Curubandé and the Santa María region that is 25 km from Liberia via La Victoria. The Rincón de la Vieja massif is part of the dividing line between the Caribbean and the Pacific in the northwest area of Costa Rica, where thirty rivers are established including the Colorado, Blanco and Ahogados.

The park belongs to the county of Liberia, province of Guanacaste and since 1973 is part of the Guanacaste Conservation Area. The average annual temperature here is 26°C and the rainfall is abundant at 79 inches (two meters) per year. The most distinctive features of this park include the thermal waters and the incredible panoramic views of this wet landscape shaped due to its elevation and rainfall. You will find the national flower, the Guaria Morada in abundance, as well as over 300 bird species, including the great curassow, mot-mot, yellow-bellied siskin and the toucanet.

Palo Verde National Park of Costa Rica
Located in the Guanacaste, this extensive protected area between the Tempisque and Bebedero rivers, host a wide variety of bird species like Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks and Northern Jacanas and this is the most important reason why this area was declared a National Park. One of the rare specie living here is the rare Jabiru. All the species are more notable in a small island of mangroves in the Tempisque River known as Bird Island.

A wide variety of bird species have been inventoried at Palo Verde but while you slowly navigate in the tranquil waters of the Tempisque River you will enjoy not just of the concert of all the birds singing in a perfect harmony but also the gracious spectacle of monkeys playing and jumping in the tree tops. The river is also rich in reptile life, this is also the habitat of crocodiles and snakes that are important part of this rich ecosystem, you will have the opportunity to see them interact in their own environment.

This Park combines evergreen tropical dry forest, fresh water wetlands and mangrove swamps. There are also hiking trails and scenic overlooks throughout the tropical dry forest of the park. La Venada, Las Calizas, El Mapache and El Manigordo Trials.

Los Baulas Marine National Park
This National Park and Conservation Refuge include the impressive Morro and El Hermoso peaks, the beautiful Carbón, Ventanas, Grande and Langosta beaches and the fascinating San Francisco, Tamarindo and Ventanas. These well-developed mangroves create an important habitat for aquatic birds and the reproduction grounds for many species; land, sea and forest. Trees reach up to 30 meters tall and the while the principal species is the red mangrove, many others can be observed such as the black, white and tea mangroves.

One of the main tourist attractions is the spawning of the endangered leatherback turtles on the beaches in these protected areas. Other species you may see are the common opossum, deer, howler monkey, coyote and raccoon. And, being an aquatic area, the reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates are effortlessly seen, including the tajalín crab, boa, black or spiny-tailed iguana and the crocodile.

Ostional National Wildlife Refuge
This 514 hectare refuge is found on the coastal area of Santa Cruz and Nicoya, in the province of Guanacaste and forms part of the Tempisque Conservation Area. The beach area measures approximately 12 km and within the refuge is the town of Ostional. This wildlife refuge is focused around the massive spawning (known as ‘arribada’) of large numbers of marine turtles which occurs between areas known La Roca, Las Cocineras and the Ostional Estuary. The story of a nesting turtle is a fascinating one itself, and to see the phenomenon first-hand is an incredible privilege. The olive ridley turtle can be found nesting here throughout the year, the leatherback turtle which is the largest of all turtle species and the green turtle nest here
between September and February, and the hawksbill turtle can also be sporadically found nesting in this refuge.

**Tortugero National Park**
This park is renowned for the sea turtles that nest there each year, and the abundance of natural canals that are home to many protected animals such as crocodiles, manatees, and otters. In fact, one of the best ways to experience the park is by boat. The extraordinarily high rainfall and rich environment of fresh and seawater creates beaches, canals, lagoons and the wetlands of Tortugero areas of exceptional biodiversity, and opportunity for nature lovers not to be missed.

**Barra Honda National Park**
Thousands of years of geological history, have produced this fascinating tropical dry forest with a system of individual caverns, with formations of stalactites and stalagmites – 50% of which are still unexplored by scientists. One cave is currently open to the public, called Terciopelo. You can also enjoy the scenic beauty from some great vantage points, as well as beautiful waterfalls. The park is located in the county of Nicoya, Guanacaste – in the Tempisque Conservation Area.

**Arenal Volcano National Park**
This volcano remains active, displaying the release of magnificent lava flows, impressive to witness at night. You can find the volcano surrounding the Arenal reservoir, between mountainous Sierra de Tilarán and the Lowlands of the North Region - part of the Arenal-Tilarán Conservation Area.

The park itself is a living laboratory, for its biologists, geologists and botanists to explore its complexity. The flora is diverse and includes trees such as guayabo del monte, ceiba, cirri, laurel, higueros, pilón, guarumo and balsa. The fauna offers the opportunity to witness paca, tapir, deer, jaguar, peccary, coati and monkeys to name just the main ones.

**Poás Volcano National Park**
The Poás is an active volcano, whose shape is defined by recent geologic activity creating the many depressions, cones and craters, creating three main sections; the main crater called Poás is considered one of the greatest in the world, the second, called Botos lagoon offers the flora and fauna of a cloud forest, with natural trails and over 70 species of birds including the mountain robin, hummingbird, quetzal, black guan, rufous-collared sparrow, emerald toucanet, large-footed finch and yellow-thighed finch. The third section is the Von Frantzius cone. You will find the park in Poas county, province of Alajuela, in the Conservation Area of the Central Volcanic Mountain Range.

**Carara National Park**
The Park is found 90 km from San Jose, in the intermediary area between dry and moist forests of the Pacific Region with an average temperature of 27° C. This park is considered a tremendous living laboratory of tropical ecosystems and their intra-relationships. Among the most notable species found here are peccary, ocelot, white-faced monkeys, and macaws. Some of the animal species cited before are in danger of extinction or have reduced populations.

**Rivers and Lakes**
Bountiful rainfall has afforded Costa Rica with an abundance of rivers, but few lakes. Practically all the country’s rivers start in the mountains, producing frothy white water courses perfect for rafting and kayaking.

Upon reaching the lowlands, the rivers become leisurely waterways, lined with fertile walls of plant life and outstanding routes for small boat trips, providing views of some of the local flora and fauna.

**Lowland Rivers**
An excursion along one of Costa Rica’s lowland rivers, whether by boat or raft, is an brilliant way to survey some of Costa Rica’s extraordinary wildlife. The trees along most riverbanks are home to iguanas, monkeys and many birds as ospreys, anhingas, colorful kingfishers, herons and mangrove swallows.

Boat trips are available on many lowland rivers such as the Sarapiqui, San Carlos and Frío Rivers, in the Northern Zone, and the Tempisque, Bebedero and Corobici Rivers, in the Northwest.

**Caribbean Canals**
One of the most admired lowland waterway excursions heads up the Caribbean Canals, which run along the Atlantic coast north from the port of Moin to the ares of Parismina, Tortuguero, and Barra del Colorado. This trip is a true jungle adventure, where you can see at first hand crocodiles, three-toed sloths, oropendolas and boat-billed herons. They also offer world-class tarpon, snook fishing (and other species).
**Arenal Lake**
This is the reservoir for the country’s most important hydroelectric projects. Arenal Lake is an enormous body of water surrounded by undulating hills and forest providing impressive scenery. This lake is particularly popular for fishermen as the rainbow bass, considered an energetic fish, thrives in these waters. Windsurfers also flock to the western end of Arenal Lake, where there is a consistently strong wind creating one of the world’s finest windsurfing spots.

**Caño Negro & Frio River**
This is a shallow, recurring lake is found near the northern border of Costa Rica and elected a wetland of global importance. During the latter half of the year it provides a bird watchers heaven when many ducks, herons and other waterfowl flock to the area. Once the precipitation reduces come December, the lake swiftly shrinks, and by February it is completely vanished, and the birds migrate onto Frio River - where Caño Negro drains.

**Bird Watching**

**Tours in Costa Rica** are famed among experienced bird watchers, and often become a new pastime for people who haven’t really considered it before upon experiencing the spectacular avian diversity in this incredible country. With around 850 bird species packed into the size of Kentucky, and more than the total species in North America you will soon see how easy it is to get enthusiastic about the variety of birds in Costa Rica. Many species of warblers, flycatchers, vireos and orioles migrate to Costa Rica every winter. — and appear in abundance. Other species you can find include; the three-wattled bellbird, which inhabits the cloud forests, the tanagers, which brighten the jungle, the jacamar which snaps up insects on the wing with an audible click of its beak, the Attila who like its namesake is a ruthless frog killer, and many other birds you might expect to see include the boobies, the rare harpy eagle (the largest of all eagles, renowned for twisting and diving through the treetops in pursuit of monkeys), pelicans, quetzals, macaws, parakeets, oropendolas, woodpeckers, and a host of birds you may not recognize but whose names you will never forget: scarlet-thighed dacnis, violaceous trogons, tody motmots, laneolated monlets, lineated foliage-gleaners, and black-capped pygmy tyrants.

**Horseback Riding**
You can find horseback riding almost everywhere in Costa Rica, there is no better way to embellish your vacation with one of these Costa Rica horseback tours. There are so many horse-back excursions to choose from, from morning trail rides taking you into the mountains to all-day expeditions through the rain forest, you can take trips through pastures, tropical forests, or down the beaches, often stopping at waterfalls and lakes. Guanacaste, one of the country’s initial areas to be conquered by Spaniards, holds quite some tradition in this regard, where many cattle ranches cover the forest-draped hills.

**Fishing**
Costa Rica is home to excellent inshore and offshore sport fishing. Costa Rica fishing in the Gulf of Papagayo and the Pacific Ocean draws all kinds of anglers to the region from the avid fishing enthusiast to families and couples on a Costa Rica fishing vacation. Costa Rica waters are rich with marine life and have never been over fished like many other popular fishing destinations.

**Fishing in Costa Rica** is really great throughout the year, but peaks between December and May. Throughout Costa Rica’s Pacific and Caribbean coasts you will find fishing charters that target a wide variety of big game marine creatures and offer some of the world’s best deep sea sport fishing — with catches including marlin, sails, dorado, wahoo, tuna, tarpon and snook.

**Canopy Tour**
An increasing number of Costa Rica eco tours provide visitors the chance to discover the rain forest canopy’s high-altitude ecosystems, a lavish and complex territory that is resident to most of the jungle’s plant and many animal species such animals as tree frogs, vine snakes, sloths, and hundreds of bird species. Serious study of these high altitude domains dates back only two decades, using sophisticated devices as mountain climbing equipment and construction cranes, which vacationers can now utilize to traverse the biological boundary, including aerial trams that go through the tree tops of a tropical forest, over 100 feet above the jungle floor. One of the most exhilarating experiences is zip-lining, which entails strapping on a mountain climbing harness and pulling yourself along suspended cables to a series of small wooden platforms built in the tops of trees. After being strapped into the harness which is securely attached to a cable, you will soar through the air like a hawk.