Costa Rica

Central Highlands (Relaxed)



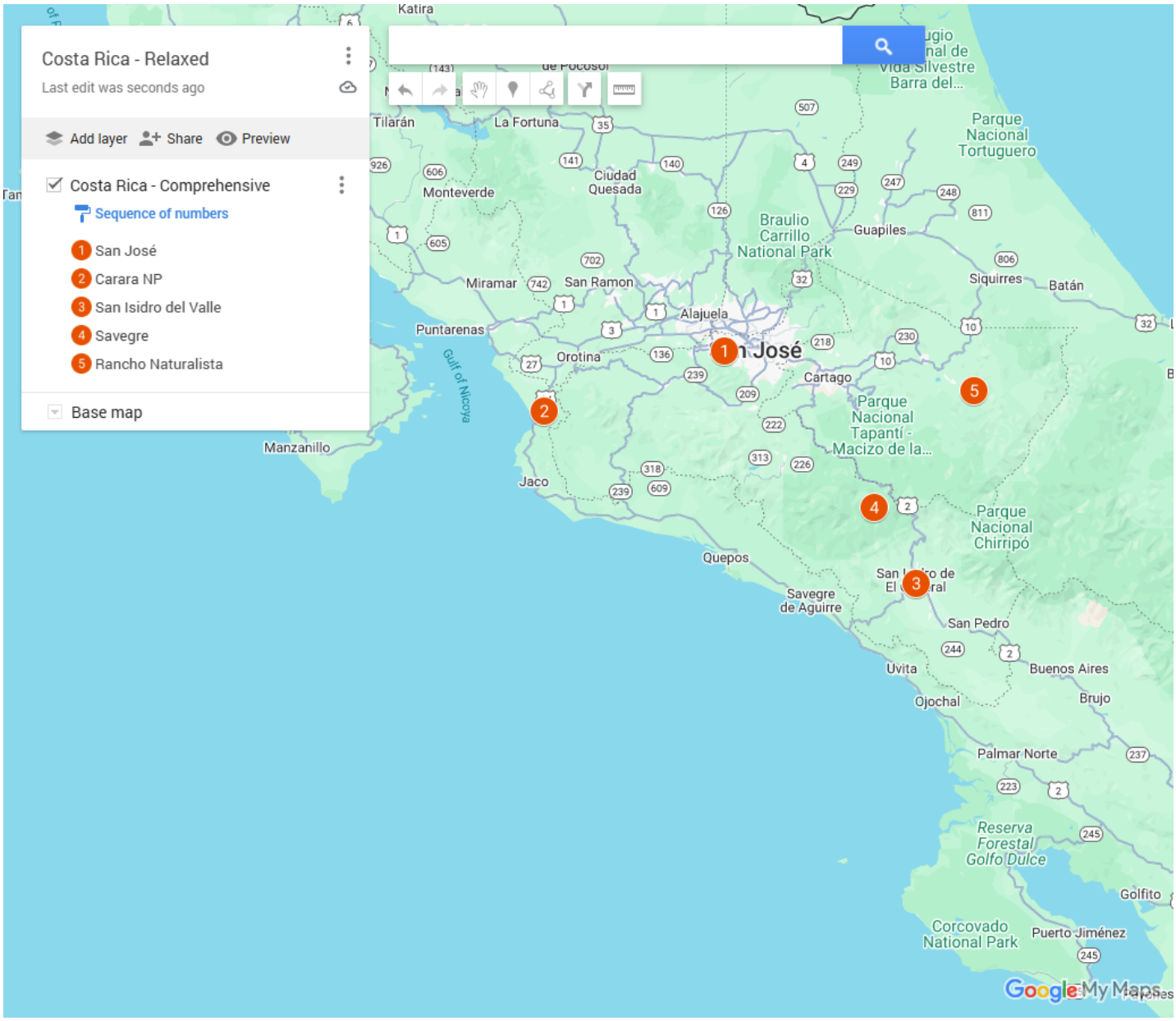
Snowcap by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Our new Relaxed tour of Costa Rica takes in several of the key birding sites of this incredibly diverse country but allowing us time to enjoy each location in an unrushed fashion. The backbone of the country is formed by a scenic mountain range, splitting the lowland forests of the Pacific and Caribbean coasts. Several roads allow unparalleled access to the lowlands, foothills, and higher altitude oak forests. Our tour takes in many attractive and exotic species including the unbelievable Snowcap, Long-tailed and Orange-collared Manakins, Scarlet Macaw, Fiery-billed Aracari, Talamanca Hummingbird, Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher and Black-and-yellow Phainoptila.

Costa Rica has strongly positioned itself towards avitourism, developing a superb infrastructure to service the numerous visiting birders, and with over 850 species it is easy to understand why! Thrilling birding, quality lodges and a relaxed pace make this destination perfect for anyone!

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in San José**
Day 2	**San José to Carara National Park**
Day 3	**Carara National Park**
Day 4	**Rio Tarcoles boat ride to San Isidro del Valle area**
Day 5	**San Isidro del Valle area**
Day 6	**San Isidro del Valle to Savegre**
Days 7 & 8	**Savegre**
Day 9	**Savegre to Rancho Naturalista**
Days 10 & 11	**Rancho Naturalista**
Day 12	**Rancho Naturalista to San José**
Day 13	**Final departures**



Birding sites in detail



Yellow-throated Toucan by Adam Riley

Carara National Park. The forest trails at Carara National Park typically provide exceptional birding even in the middle of the day due to its excellent trail system! The healthy population of Scarlet Macaw is one of the reserve's star attractions and we can expect to see them flying gracefully over the treetops from one feeding site to another. Strange snapping noises from the dense undergrowth should give away the presence of Orange-collared Manakins displaying like 'popping' popcorn along the branches, White-throated Magpie-Jays scold us from overhead branches and perhaps we will be visited by the resident, White-nosed Coati. Some of our other targets while birding through the mixed habitats includes such regional endemics as the beautiful Baird's and Black-throated Trogons, Fiery-billed Aracari, Golden-naped Woodpecker, Rufous-breasted and Riverside Wrens and Black-hooded Antshrike are often found moving through the thicker scrub.

Flocks might give away the presence of White-whiskered Puffbird, Northern Royal Flycatcher, Southern Beardless Tyrannulet, Long-billed Gnatwren, Pale-billed Woodpecker, Tawny-winged and Northern Barred Woodcreepers, Dot-winged Antwren, Chestnut-backed Antbird, the boldly patterned Red-capped Manakin, Northern Bentbill, Streaked Flycatcher and Greenish Elaenia. Collared Forest Falcon and Crested Guan are both found here in lower densities than in the Caribbean lowlands, and it will probably take some persistence to



Scarlet Macaw by Adam Riley



Montezuma Oropendola by Bobby Wilcox

locate some of the more secretive denizens of the forest floor such as Black-faced Antthrush and Streak-chested Antpitta. Ferruginous Pygmy Owl will likely respond to an imitation of its call during the daytime, while a night outing could produce nocturnal species such as Lesser Nighthawk and Spectacled Owl.

Rio Tarcoles. We will enjoy a relaxing boat ride on the Tarcoles River, a pleasant way to view the region's birds and wildlife. Possibilities include the impressive Boat-billed Heron, Bare-throated Tiger Heron, Wood Stork, American White Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Costa Rican Swift, Northern Jacana, the tiny American Pygmy Kingfisher, Mangrove Swallow, Mantled Howler Monkeys roaring from the treetops, and American Crocodile basking on the sandbanks. We have a second opportunity to find several mangrove specialists, as the forests towards the delta are made up of all 5 species of Mangrove! Mangrove Hummingbird, Mangrove Vireo, Northern Scrub Flycatcher, Panama Flycatcher, and Common (Mangrove) Black Hawk are all regularly seen.

Carara National Park to Savegre. This will be a memorable journey from the lush Pacific coastal lowland forests and secondary habitats up through the foothills and mid-elevation forests into the high Cordillera Central de Talamanca.

San Isidro del Valle. The long and beautiful intermontane San Isidro Valley lies just to the east of the highest Talamanca Mountain Range. We'll spend most of our time in the low to middle elevation tropical rainforests and cloud forests. It was this area that the famous botanist and ornithologist, Dr Alexander F. Skutch fell in love with in the 1930's. Indeed, he lived in the area most of his life and co-authored the first guide to the birds of Costa Rica in 1989.

This site will provide our best opportunity to see Scarlet-rumped (Cherrie's) Tanager, Olivaceous Piculet, Red-crowned Woodpecker, Lesser Elaenia, Bran-colored Flycatcher, Scrub Greenlet, and a few other species at the northern end of their ranges. We will make sure to save time for a stop at the San Isidro University campus, to look for one of the most exciting birds in the whole Field Guide: Turquoise Cotinga! Hopefully, we will be in luck.

If we have the good fortune to happen across a flowering Inga tree, there is a huge host of new hummingbird species that find the nectar-rich blossoms of this special



Flame-colored Tanager by Bobby Wilcox



Fiery-billed Aracari Bobby Wilcox

genus irresistible. Garden Emerald, Snowy-bellied Hummingbird, Charming Hummingbird, and the delightful, White-crested Coquette all inhabit this region!

Los Cusingos. This site was named after the Fiery-billed Aracari, one of many species we can expect to see here. We'll bird the open areas and gardens where several fruiting trees and bushes attract a great variety of desirable species such as Turquoise Cotinga, Red-capped, Blue-crowned, and Orange-collared Manakins, Lesson's Motmot, Riverside Wren, Baird's Trogon, Bicolored Antbird, Common Potoo, Golden-naped Woodpecker, White-crested Coquette, Bronzy Hermit, Long-billed and Stripe-throated Hermits, Scaly-breasted Hummingbird. A convenient feeding station in the garden often plays host to Silver-throated, Scarlet-rumped, Grey-headed, Speckled and Bay-headed Tanagers, Spot-crowned Euphonia, Shining Honeycreeper, Red-legged and Green Honeycreepers and Blue Dacnis.

Savegre. We'll crest a pass of the scenic Talamanca Mountains at nearly 3 300m (11 000ft). Some of the specials we will seek out at the highest point include Timberline Wren, Black-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Sooty Thrush, and the localized Volcano Junco, before dropping back down to 2 200m (7 200ft) in the valley of San Gerardo de Dota.

Here we will enjoy birding in forests dominated by massive oaks, harbouring a huge variety of wildlife, including a wide selection of birds. The cool highlands will no doubt provide a pleasant break after several days in the warmer lowlands. Several species here are only shared with the neighbouring temperate forest of Panama and include Wrenthrush, Costa Rican Pygmy Owl, Large-footed and Yellow-thighed Finches, Grey-tailed Mountaingem, Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher and Black-and-yellow Phainoptila, Fiery-throated Hummingbird, Flame-throated and Black-cheeked Warblers, and the scarce Silvery-throated Jay. Hummingbird feeders in the area host Lesser Violetear, Scintillant, Volcano and the oversized Talamanca Hummingbirds, as well as the outrageous Violet Sabrewing.



Grey-tailed Mountaingem by Bobby Wilcox

We will also spend some time along the pristine Savegre River, where possibilities include American Dipper, Torrent



Long-tailed Silky-flycatcher by Bobby Wilcox

Tyrannulet, and the migrant Louisiana Waterthrush. Night birding could reveal Dusky Nightjar or Bare-shanked Screech Owl.

Cerro de la Muerte. Continued birding in the highlands might produce the secretive Spotted Wood Quail, Sulphur-winged Parakeet, Ruddy Treerunner and Buffy Tuftedcheek often found on branches covered with bromeliads, Acorn Woodpecker, Black-capped Flycatcher, Flame-colored Tanager, Ochraceous and Dark Pewees sallying out for insects from exposed perches, Yellow-winged Vireo, the active Collared Whitestart, Sooty-capped Bush Tanager, Black-thighed Grosbeak, Slaty Flowerpiercer and Golden-browed Chlorophonia.

Rancho Naturalista. Rancho Naturalista is the perfect introduction to our tour of the country, relaxed, friendly, and serving delicious locally sourced gourmet food. Expect to be enchanted by the view from the balcony, the distant, smoking Turrialba Volcano on the horizon and numerous hummingbirds at arms-length. With over 450 species recorded in the general area, the next few days are sure to be packed with excitement.

Starting on the balcony, we shall work our way through a myriad of hummingbirds that may include Crowned Woodnymph, White-necked Jacobin, Green Hermit, Green Thorntail, Violet Sabrewing, Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer and Green-crowned Brilliant. Aside from the numerous hummingbirds, we can also expect to see the brightly coloured Scarlet-rumped and Blue-grey Tanagers, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Montezuma Oropendola and bossy Collared Aracaris.



Violet Sabrewing by Adam Riley

Moving off the deck, our focus will remain on hummers as we reach the *Verbena* hedges and search for one of the most targeted birds in Central America, the Snowcap. It is a frequent visitor along the flower laden hedges, where we may also find Black-crested Coquette, Violet-headed Hummingbird and possibly Garden Emerald.

We will also spend some time near the Hummingbird Pools, where any number of hummers and other birds arrive in the afternoon for a dip in the water or a drink. The more open secondary growth areas also provide us with good chances of finding Grey-headed Chachalaca, Brown-hooded Parrots and Finsch's Parakeets overhead, Scarlet-rumped Cacique, Chestnut-headed

Oropendola, Black-headed Saltator and a host of tanagers including Black-and-yellow, Olive, Speckled and Crimson-collared.

Centro Manu. Flowering bushes are excellent for hummingbirds, with Rufous-tailed, Blue-chested and Violet-headed often encountered, as well as Purple-crowned Fairy, Green Thorntail, Bronze-tailed Plumeleteer and various species of hermit. The gardens are frequented by several trogons, parrots, toucans, tanagers and manakins. If we are lucky, we may find the critically endangered Great Green Macaw or Black Hawk-Eagle.



Great Green Macaw by Adam Riley

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease	■ ■ ■	Easy to comfortable. Suitable for most birding / wildlife interest levels.
Birding Ease	■ ■ ■	Mostly easy. Garden & lodge birding typically provides good visuals of most species. Some optional forest interior birding.
Accommodation	■ ■ ■	Comfortable.
Walking / Trails	■ ■ ■	Mostly short walks on relatively flat ground. Depending on weather conditions, some areas can be muddy.
Vehicles / Roads	■ ■ ■	Good quality roads. Most drives are reasonably short.
Photography	■ ■ ■	Good. Lots of fruit & hummingbird feeders. Photography more difficult within closed forest canopy.
Annoyances	■ ■ ■	Small biting insects can be numerous at times.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 13;
- All lodgings;
- Drinking water;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services.
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- No tips or gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry, and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

Our Relaxed series of tours are designed to focus on having an enjoyable holiday with a bird and wildlife focus. Where possible; we have reduced or removed long drives, single night stays and poor/rustic accommodation. We have also sought to reduce or remove difficult hikes, narrow/muddy trails and otherwise oppressive environmental conditions. Early starts and night birding are mostly optional, and we will not spend much time searching for difficult and/or skulking species. These tours are not suitable for hardcore birders and listers, or dedicated photographers.

- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.
- It can be hot with harsh sun in some areas of Costa Rica, especially along the coast or in the lowlands, so please come prepared with hats and sun cream for protection. Humidity levels are also high throughout most of the country.
- Temperatures in the highlands can be quite cold, especially at night so please also pack some cold-weather gear.
- Mosquitoes and tiny bloodsucking flies can be numerous at times and it's advisable to pack a good supply of DEET or another effective insect repellent.
- Accommodation throughout the trip is quite comfortable and a variety of western and local cuisines are available throughout the tour.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour begins with a welcome dinner in San José on day 1 and concludes after breakfast on day 13.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Juan Santamaría International Airport, San José (IATA: SJO) is the main port of entry and departure for international flights to Costa Rica.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.