



Iguana - Costa Rica

Raft Pacuare River • Visit a sea turtle rescue project • Explore and discover Coyote beach and the Pacific Coast • Hike Cerro Chato volcano • Visit Arenal volcano • Soak in Baldi Hot Springs • Cycle Lake Arenal • Hike Cabo Blanco Nature Reserve Snorkel and sea kayak Tortuga Island • Explore San José

11 days: San José – San José

Fare: US\$2799

Season: December to April

Costa Rica packs quite a punch when it comes to sheer beauty and first-rate outdoor activities. The Iguana takes you on the best adventures this country has to offer in 11 unforgettable days. You'll hike, paddle, cycle and snorkel your way around the country, exploring off-the-beaten-track locations and meeting the friendly locals along the way. The trip starts with a rafting expedition on the mighty Pacuare River down to the Caribbean lowlands, then you'll hike around Arenal Volcano and cycle on the fringes of the beautiful lake at its base. You'll hike in the Monteverde Cloud Forest before making your way to the Pacific coast, where we hike through Cabo Blanco National Park, snorkel with sea turtles and paddle sea kayaks to idyllic Tortuga Island before returning to San José, Costa Rica's cosmopolitan capital city.

If you're too busy to come along for the entire adventure, that's OK! We're very flexible - and we have lots of options for the time-stressed. Give us a call - you'll be surprised at how well we can work with your schedule, even if it doesn't appear obvious when you first read our itineraries!

Phil says: "When I first started exploring Costa Rica it was way off the tourist map, with most people preferring to visit places like Mexico and Belize. Now people have started to realise what an incredible country it is with amazing diversity, a friendly, welcoming culture and adventure opportunities like nowhere else. There are a few more people travelling to Costa Rica now than there were then, but a lot of the places we go on this trip are still undiscovered by the masses – thank goodness! You'll love the out-of-the-way places and incredible activities the Iguana offers."

Saturday

Arrive San José

Your trip begins in San José, Costa Rica's capital city. If you're flying in on day one of the trip, your ACTIVE SOUTH AMERICA trip leader will meet you at the airport at 2pm and take you to your accommodation. You'll have a couple of hours to explore San José's beautiful town squares, quaint cafés and bustling streets where lively street performers dot the sidewalks. San José sits in a beautiful valley surrounded by towering volcanoes. Its location, just 60 miles from the Pacific Ocean to the West and the Caribbean Sea to the East, gives it a mild, spring-like climate. In the evening you'll meet up with your ACTIVE SOUTH AMERICA trip leader and the rest of your group for a full briefing and a delicious tico dinner!

ACCOMMODATION: Fleur de Lys Hotel, San José

(D)

Sunday

Raft Pacuare River

You'll have an early start this morning to the rafting put-in on the Pacuare River, one of the most beautiful rivers in the world. The rafting is suitable for all experience levels and you will receive a full safety briefing from our guides. We'll set off down the river, descending Grade III and IV rapids from Costa Rica's central highlands down to the Caribbean lowlands through virgin rainforest. Lush, green vegetation hangs down the towering vertical walls of this amazing river canyon. This trip is known as one of the world's best rafting trips and you'll see why – with exciting white water, stunning scenery and pleasant water temperature, it's an unforgettable rafting experience for novice paddlers and experts alike! After take-out, we continue on to Fortuna, a small town at the foot of the Arenal Volcano where we'll stay for the next two nights. The views are amazing from your accommodation – on a clear night you can often see the

glow of lava from the volcano!

ACCOMMODATION: *Cabinas Los Guayabos, Fortuna*

(B,L,D)

Monday

Hike Cerro Chato, La Fortuna waterfall, soak in Baldi Hot Springs

This morning we'll begin our ascent of Cerro Chato, a dormant volcano with a picturesque crater lagoon in its centre. We begin by hiking through typical *tico* farmland, before entering stunning virgin rainforest on the side of the volcano. It's a heart-pumping hike to the top, but the rewards are worth the effort! At the summit we'll be greeted with views of Arenal volcano. We'll head back down to enjoy our lunch at the spectacular Catarata La Fortuna. This 230-foot (70m) waterfall, surrounding rainforest and black volcanic rock are a dramatic finale and the plunge pool is the perfect place to cool off for a well-deserved swim! Later, we'll wind down with a soak in the Baldi Hot Springs.

ACCOMMODATION: *Cabinas Los Guayabos, Fortuna*

(B,L,D)

Tuesday

Cycle Lake Arenal, Monteverde

This morning we'll do an amazing cycling trip around the edge of Lake Arenal. After an early breakfast, we begin by riding under the rainforest canopy as we follow the shores of the lake. You'll be amazed at the cacophony of calls from toucans, howler monkeys and other wildlife. Later we'll head to Monteverde Cloud Forest, nestled in the heart of one of the most beautiful valleys in the Americas in the cloudy heights of the Tilarán mountain range. Monteverde will be our base for the next two nights. We'll enjoy spectacular views of the sun setting over the Pacific Ocean from our cosy lodging in the hills just outside Santa Elena township.

ACCOMMODATION: *Sunset Hotel, Monteverde*

(B,L,D)

Wednesday

Hike Monteverde Cloud Forest, free afternoon

Today we'll explore some of the most intriguing forest trails in Central America in the Monteverde Cloud Forest. Laden with native flora and fauna, and tucked in a highland valley of the Costa Rican mountains, Monteverde offers a peaceful hiking experience with stunning waterfalls, lush forest canopy, and plenty of native animals ducking in and out of the trails. When we get back from our hike, you'll have the afternoon free to try some of the wide range of optional activities on offer in Monteverde – you'll find everything from canopy tours to horse riding or even a *mariposario* (butterfly garden)! If you'd like an adrenalin-pumping view of the forest canopy from above, there's an option to take a zip line high above the trees. It's an unforgettable ride with magical views of the rainforest and the valleys below.

ACCOMMODATION: *Sunset Hotel, Monteverde*

(B,L,D)

Thursday

Explore Coyote beach and relax in a hammock!

Today we'll continue down to the tropical warmth of the Pacific lowlands, and hit the Pacific Ocean for the first time on the trip. Our home for the next couple of nights will be Rancho Tanga, an idyllic beach camp on Playa Coyote – an isolated white sand Costa Rican beach on the Nicoya Peninsula. This afternoon we'll explore the Rio Coyote estuary, where caiman are often seen and howler monkeys swing through the trees above us. If you prefer, you can relax at the beach, swim, wander along the shore, explore tidal rock pools, or just laze in a hammock while we set up camp. Later we'll enjoy a dinner prepared by Tanga's wife Mayela – you'll never forget the seafood feasts here.

ACCOMMODATION: *Camping on Coyote Beach – paradise on Earth!*

(B,L,D)

Phil says: *"Coyote Beach is a very special place to me. I first met Tanga in 1992 when I stumbled across Coyote beach on a surf trip with a couple of tico friends. We hit it off so well that I ended up staying for a few months, and helped Tanga build his first house, or ranchito, which is still standing today! It's an amazing place, and Tanga and Mayela are great hosts."*

Friday

Coastal hike to sea turtle rescue project

Today we'll hike over Punta Coyote to Caletas Beach – incredibly, even more beautiful and deserted than Coyote – where we'll meet the hardy volunteers of Pretoma, a sea turtle preservation organisation. From July to February, these dedicated conservationists live in tents and lean-tos, and patrol the beach every night to protect the eggs of rare sea

turtles from predators. We'll wander back to camp, through reefs and rock pools where tropical fish, snails, crabs and molluscs abound, before hiking up Cerro Coyote to watch another incredible sunset over the Pacific and enjoy panoramic views of the deserted coastline.

ACCOMMODATION: *Camping on Coyote Beach*

(B,L,D)

Saturday

Hike Cabo Blanco Nature Reserve

We'll leave Coyote Beach this morning to make our way down to Cabo Blanco Nature Reserve at the southern tip of the Nicoya Peninsula. This national reserve is the oldest wildlife sanctuary in Costa Rica, and is home to several native species of monkeys, sloths, raccoons and parrots. We'll spend the afternoon hiking through steep forest terrain to the tip of the peninsula, and back along the white sand beaches to the trailhead. Tonight we'll stay on the Nicoya Peninsula, in charming bungalows right on the beach surrounded by jungle. Our hosts, Belgian couple Hilda and Andre, will welcome you and make sure you're well fed, with several local specialities on this evening's menu! After dinner you can enjoy a stroll on the beach, swim in the beautiful calm waters, or just relax.

ACCOMMODATION: *Hotel Celaje, Montezuma*

(B,L,D)

If you're short on time, it's possible to finish your *Iguana* trip on this afternoon and we'll arrange for you to head back to San José.

Sunday

Sea kayak and snorkel Tortuga Island

This morning we'll paddle our sea kayaks across to Tortuga Island, a short distance offshore from the Curu Nature Reserve. After a familiarisation briefing from our guides, we'll set off across the warm, clear waters of the Golfo de Nicoya. This beautiful stretch of water is frequented by whales, so bring your camera! When we arrive on the island, we'll have lunch on a picture-postcard beach. Tortuga Island is a stunning place, with pristine beaches laden with coconut palms, clear water and a green rainforest interior. In the afternoon, we'll set off with our masks and snorkels into the warm Pacific waters surrounding Tortuga Island to look for sea turtles, iguanas, lobsters and to swim among hundreds of varieties of fish in the crystal clear waters. Then we'll head back to the mainland for another night in Montezuma.

ACCOMMODATION: *Hotel Celaje, Montezuma*

(B,L,D)

Monday

Hike Curu Nature Reserve

Today you'll be hiking in beautiful Curu Nature Reserve, which boasts rich and diverse wildlife in five different habitats, ranging from marine zones and mangrove swamps, to tropical dry and moist forest. In the early afternoon, we'll take a ferry across the Golfo de Nicoya to Puntarenas where we'll stop for lunch before heading back to our hotel, just outside San José, to enjoy our final evening together.

ACCOMMODATION: *Local hotel, near San José*

(B,L,D)

Tuesday

San José, depart

Today is the last day of your *Iguana* trip in Costa Rica with us. If you have time before your flight or you're staying on for a few days, we'll be happy to make some suggestions on how to make the most of it. For example, you won't want to miss San José's bustling central market, and relaxing with an ice cream in the central square makes for fantastic people-watching and a priceless view of *tico* city life. If you prefer to take in a little culture, your guide will be happy to point you in the direction of San José's many museums, art galleries and charming streetscapes. Alternatively, if you're flying out today, we'll send you home refreshed, relaxed and invigorated, after experiencing the best that Costa Rica has to offer – great activities, fantastic scenery and friendly people. *Pura vida!*

(B)

Important Information

ACCOMMODATION: The *Iguana* is an active adventure-oriented trip around Costa Rica. As with all ACTIVE trips, we've chosen accommodations for their comfort and cleanliness – not the number of channels available on the

television! The places we stay are off the beaten track and truly spectacular. For example, at Tanga's Beach Camp, we camp on the beach, which is often the highlight of the trip, but the facilities are quite basic. Other places, such as Hotel Celaje and Cabinas Los Guayabos, are more comfortable with a higher level of facilities. Accommodations are twin-share with single rooms available in most locations. Occasionally it may be necessary to have more than two people per room in one or two of the places where we stay.

RECOMMENDED FLIGHTS: You can fly into San José any time on the first day of the trip, but we recommend you arrive before noon. On the last day of your trip you can fly out at any time. If you want to arrive earlier or leave later, we're happy to help out booking extra hotel accommodation for you.

TRIP START: If you arrive on the first day of your trip, an ACTIVE SOUTH AMERICA representative will meet you at the airport at 2pm and take you to your accommodation – you'll have the rest of the afternoon to explore San José. If you're already in San José, you'll meet your trip leader and the rest of your group in the lobby of the Fleur de Lys Hotel at 6pm.

TRIP END: You'll wake up just outside San José on the last day of your trip, so you can book a flight home departing any time that day – we'll be happy to drop you off at the airport any time before noon.

FITNESS: You need a reasonable level of fitness to enjoy yourself on the *Iguana* trip. You don't have to be young or extremely fit (although if you are, you won't be bored) but you should be in the habit of doing at least some regular exercise. Age and experience are not important. We would rather have an older person with a good attitude than a 22-year-old couch potato!

EXPERIENCE: You don't have to have any outdoor experience to do one of our trips. We offer trips that enable you to make the most of Latin America's awesome outdoor environment, culture and history. Our trip leaders are highly trained and experienced outdoor guides, and they'll look after you! You don't need any experience in snorkelling, rafting or sea kayaking on the *Iguana*. All you need is to be energetic and in reasonable shape and you'll have a wonderful time. We manage the level of commitment to suit your experience, and we have an impeccable safety record.

FLEXIBILITY: Costa Rica is in a developing part of the world, and we can't tell you that everything runs like clockwork in Latin America. What we *can* tell you is that we are experienced adventure travel leaders, and we know how to keep things operating as smoothly as possible, even when conditions are challenging. That's why we're here! If you bring flexibility, an open mind and a sense of humour you'll find your trip goes even smoother!

INCLUDED: The trip fare is US\$2799. The trip fare includes just about everything, specifically:

- All guiding services. We always have an experienced trip leader with every trip and will have a local guide on many of our excursions for extra local knowledge.
- All ground transportation.
- Comfortable accommodation for your entire trip. We can also book pre- and post-trip accommodation for you if required.
- All your meals.
- All drinking water. Alcohol and other drinks are not included – although we've been known to spring for a few drinks here and there!
- All snorkelling, rafting, sea kayaking, hiking and biking as described in the itinerary, excluding optional activities as noted. None of the activities are compulsory, so if you prefer to sit some of them out and just have a 'down day' hanging out with a book and a hammock, then that's fine by us. This is your vacation after all!
- Tips for local activity guides and drivers are taken care of by us.

NOT INCLUDED: This is your holiday, and we are serious about not nickel-and-diming you! You'll have a few drinks to cover, extra activities if you choose them, and you'll probably feel like tipping your guide at the end of a fabulous

time, but you won't be pulling out your wallet every few minutes on your ACTIVE SOUTH AMERICA trip!

Pura vida!

Itinerary valid through April 2010