

Macaw Costa Rica



Wilderness adventure on the Pacuare River • Hike Cerro Chato near Arenal Volcano Soak in Baldi Hot Springs • Hiking and canopy tour in Los Angeles Cloud Forest Sea kayaking and hiking in Manuel Antonio National Park • Night hike on the Osa Peninsula • Snorkel Caño Island • Hike Corcovado National Park

12 days: San José–San José

Fare: US\$3999

Season: Year Round

Costa Rica has it all when it comes to sheer beauty, wildlife and once-in-a-lifetime outdoor activities. The Macaw takes you on the best adventures this country has to offer in 12 unforgettable days. You'll hike, fly, paddle and snorkel your way around the country, exploring remote wilderness areas that simply don't have roads while staying in local accommodations with incredible views and meeting the friendly local ticos along the way. The trip starts with a multi-day wilderness expedition on the gorgeous Pacuare River down to the Caribbean lowlands. Then you'll hike around Arenal Volcano and soak in hot springs at its base. You'll hike as well as get a bird's eye view of the private Los Angeles Cloud Forest before making your way to the Pacific coast, where you'll hike throughout and sea kayak near Manuel Antonio National Park, before flying down to explore the Osa Peninsula. Hike Corcovado National Park, one of the most bio diverse areas on the planet, and snorkel near idyllic Caño Island before returning to San José, Costa Rica's cosmopolitan capital city. The Macaw captures the absolute best of this small yet extremely diverse country, and is sure to make you sweat, stand in awe, and feel well looked after with amazing activities, incredible places to stay, fine food and warm tico hospitality.

DAY-TO-DAY ITINERARY

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, a converted Victorian mansion. 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 climate year round. 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

Wilderness rafting on the Pacuare River, hiking

We'll leave early this morning and make our way east towards the Caribbean, bound for the put in of the Pacuare River – arguably the most beautiful river in the world surrounded by pristine wilderness. After a full safety briefing from our guides, we'll push off the bank and descend Class III rapids through virgin rainforest accompanied by birds and butterflies. Lush, green vegetation hangs down the towering vertical walls of this picturesque river canyon. This trip is known as one of the world's best wilderness trips and you'll see why – with exciting white water, stunning scenery and pleasant water temperature, it's an unforgettable experience for novice paddlers and experts alike! This afternoon we'll arrive at the Rios Tropicales Lodge. This eco-lodge set within a 1500-acre

private reserve and perched just above the river banks, features gorgeous wooden bungalows, a hydro-electric generator, and not a sight or sound that isn't generated from either the river or the rainforest! This afternoon we'll hike even further into the virgin forest to hidden waterfalls and natural pools and be back in time for a drink in the bar overlooking the river.

ACCOMMODATION: Rios Tropicales Lodge, on the banks of the Pacuare River (B,L,D)

Phil: "We pulled out all the stops on this trip to really see Costa Rica in style. You're going to the most amazing locations including the Osa Peninsula, playing hard each day and staying at the best places. The wilderness lodges and inns on this trip, especially Villa Blanca and Casa Corcovado, are a big step up from those on our other trips – you'll be blown away!"

MONDAY

Rafting on the Pacuare River, soak in the Baldi Hot Springs

After a hearty breakfast and another chance to sample the world finest coffee, we'll pack the rafts again and head into the Class III/IV Pacuare river gorge, passing natural waterslides and massive waterfalls, as they cascade from over a hundred feet over our heads. This is an unforgettable days paddling. 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 from your cabin are amazing – on a clear night you can often see the glow of lava from the volcano, known for its frequent eruptions. Later, we'll wind down with a soak in the Baldi Hot Springs.

ACCOMMODATION: Fortuna Lodgings, Fortuna (B,L,D)

TUESDAY

Hike Cerro Chato, La Fortuna waterfall

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 rolling farmland before entering lush 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 the 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! If you'd prefer a less challenging option today, the Arenal area is an outdoor lover's paradise and there are plenty of options within a stones throw including a cycling trip around Lake Arenal, a hike through the Arenal rain forest reserve or a canyoning trip down a series of waterfalls. La Fortuna is also the perfect place to soak in the town atmosphere from a local café, take a bike ride through the countryside at the foot of the volcano, or take another hike to the brilliant butterfly garden and eco centre close to town. If you'd like another soak in some of the best-known hot springs in the world with a towering volcano as the backdrop, then you're in the right place!

ACCOMMODATION: Fortuna Lodgings, Fortuna (B,L,D)

"This was a magical adventure, the perfect time away from home to a very different culture, to experience wildlife and flora and people that were rare and exciting to be part of. The tour guide was the best; the naturalist really knew his stuff. Fascinating, fun, challenging and relaxing, all rolled into one."

- Ellie Kahn (Van Nuys, USA) Aug 2009

WEDNESDAY

Hike Los Angeles Cloud Forest

This morning we'll drive a short distance through the mountain spine that divides Costa Rica's Pacific and Caribbean zones to one of Costa Rica's best kept secrets, the Los Angeles Cloud Forest reserve. A hike through this tropical highland mountain forest is like stepping into another world with its lush vegetation and abundance of ferns and mosses that seem to soak up the mountain mist that hangs in the air. This breathtaking forest is more off the beaten track than other cloud forests and because of this, is known for its occasional sightings of jaguars and ocelots as well as over 300 bird species. Keep an eye out – you never know what you might see through the mist! The wildlife and vegetation isn't the only thing special here – the waterfalls that seem to appear out of nowhere get taller as we hike further, and the birding here is world renowned. We're in for a treat tonight – comfort and conservation go hand in hand at this luxurious eco-conscious boutique hotel.

ACCOMMODATION: Villa Blanca Cloud Forest Hotel, Los Angeles Cloud Forest (B,L,D)

Phil: "The Macaw trip takes you to some really amazing spots, some of which are seriously off-the-beaten-track, with incredible wildlife and scenery - but that's only half of it. A lot of these places have no road access so getting there is what really makes the experience special."

THURSDAY

Los Angeles Cloud Forest zip line canopy tour, free beach time in Quepos

This morning we'll have the chance to explore the rain forest canopy from above as we take a unique tree line cloud forest expedition with expert guides. After a fitting with helmets, harnesses and gloves, we'll fly across jungle platforms set up high in the cloud forest canopy, taking in the spectacular views of the surrounding rain forest from a bird's eye view. This afternoon we'll leave the tropical mountain forests and make our way down to the Pacific coast. You can almost hear the Salsa music get louder as we descend towards the lowlands, along with the increasing number of palm trees and tropical fruit stands dotted along the side of the road. A trip along the Pacific coast wouldn't be complete without making a stop at a tico fruit stand - a fresh mango, agua de pipa straight out of the coconut or a miniature pineapple on a stick! We'll arrive in Quepos, the gateway to Manuel Antonio National park. Put simply, Manuel Antonio is absolutely stunning, with its dense tropical rain forest that frames the pristine white sand beaches fringed with palm trees. Over the next few days you'll have plenty of free time to explore the area on our own, relax and swim at the beach, hike one of the many beach and rainforest trails, or check out the many optional activities available in this beautiful beach town.

ACCOMMODATION: Quepos hotel, Quepos (B,L,D)

FRIDAY

Hiking and exploring beaches in Manuel Antonio National Park

This morning we'll depart early and head into Manuel Antonio National Park. It's difficult, and in fact almost impossible, to hike in this particular part of Costa Rica without spotting white-faced or squirrel monkeys and they are close, so be prepared for some close-up photos opportunities! Our trail will lead us to Playa Espadilla Sur, a stunning beach that leads to the Tombolo, the isthmus dividing two opposite facing beaches. As we hike around the Tombolo Peninsula trail, the wildlife becomes more prolific with every step, not to mention the scenery becoming more spectacular – lush rainforest pushing against an immaculate curve of white sand! Keep an eye out for three-toed sloths, monkeys, agoutis, and hundreds of bird species. Later, we'll hike deeper into the forest and eventually meet the coast again after a steep hike leading to the top of the high cliffs overlooking Puerto Escondido beach and the surrounding coastline. Tonight you'll have a chance to explore on your own, sample one of the many local restaurants and perhaps check out the local nightlife.

ACCOMMODATION: Quepos hotel, Quepos (B,L)

SATURDAY

Sea kayaking in Manuel Antonio National Park

Today we'll take to sea kayaks and explore this environment from a different perspective. It's hard to imagine more perfect white sand beaches, but the inlets and bays of Manuel Antonio National Park look even better from a kayak, and the water underneath is crystal clear! Manuel Antonio National Park, as well as being one of the most perfect places on earth to kick back and relax, has options galore so if today you prefer to hike some more, soak up the sun at the beach or try something a little different, then you're in the right place! The white sand sheltered bays of the park are idyllic for swimming or snorkelling, and the surrounding area is the perfect setting for sport fishing, mountain biking, dolphin watching and much more.

ACCOMMODATION: *Quepos hotel, Quepos (B,L,D)*

SUNDAY

Fly to Osa Peninsula and jungle boat journey, night hike

This morning we'll take a short flight south to the Osa Peninsula and a jungle boat cruise up the Sierpe River and along the coast looking for wildlife before arriving at our lodge. Besides being an exciting journey, it's the only way to get down to these parts as there are simply no roads. The Osa Peninsula is described by National Geographic as 'the most biologically intense place on earth' – there aren't many descriptions or superlatives that can out-do that! With good reason too, with its immense swathe of isolated Pacific rainforest is teeming with wildlife. The added bonus here is that you will actually see it – everywhere, if you know where to look! Over the next few days we'll have the chance to

"Active South America is a great way to get away from it all and completely refresh your mind and soul. You get the balance of a challenging adventure to a relaxing vacation."

Brian Pastorini (Horseheads, USA) Jan 2010

hike the greatest wildlife trails on the planet, explore stunning untouched palm fringed coastline by boat, and explore crystal clear Pacific waters with mask and snorkel – or simply sit back and relax and soak in the surroundings from the comfort of your own hammock! This remote but luxurious rainforest lodge will be our home for the last few days, so you'll have time to settle in and take in the beach and coastal views. After dinner you'll take a night time hike into the rain forest with our naturalist guide. Many rainforest inhabitants are nocturnal, making the rainforest an exciting and magical place to visit after dark and we'll be fitted with night vision goggles - making wildlife viewing a unique experience!

ACCOMMODATION: *Casa Corcovado, Osa Peninsula (B,L,D)*

MONDAY

Wildlife and hiking in Corcovado National Park

This morning we'll set off by boat for Corcovado National Park, one of the most pristine areas of natural diversity on the planet. Our first stop will be the San Pedrillo Ranger Station, our spring board to miles of hiking trails deep into the heart of the park. The interaction with the wildlife here is nothing short of thrilling where we'll meet

locals such as white-faced capuchin monkey, collared peccary, white-nosed coati and scarlet macaws – all of which use our trail as often as humans do! Yet these are only a handful of animals that we'll be able to see here. As we hike deeper into the rain forest we'll discover that Corcovado's wildlife sights and sounds are never ending, not to mention unimaginably beautiful. Keep your eyes peeled for more species of monkey, tapirs and giant anteaters and hundreds of species of bird – the good thing here is, we don't have to look very hard, especially with our naturalist guide on hand!

Later we'll return to our Lodge at Drake bay for a well earned dinner and time to relax in a hammock, on the beach, or at the bar.

ACCOMMODATION: *Casa Corcovado, Osa Peninsula (B,L,D)*

TUESDAY

Snorkelling and hiking on Caño Island

This morning we'll take a boat ride across to Caño Island. Keep an eye out for whales, giant manta rays and dolphins along the way as they are frequent local visitors to these waters and often accompany the boat. Caño Island is more than your run of the mill tropical island – Caño is the end tip of numerous underwater rock formations, which is evident from its high cliffs rising up to 230 feet out of the water. After instructions from our guide, we'll take to the warm waters with snorkel, mask and flippers to explore the underwater world that is home to sea turtles, manta rays and hundreds of species of tropical fish. The waters off Caño Island are protected as a biological reserve and are usually much clearer than the mainland, making the sheer number of fish that weave in and out of the spectacular submarine lava and coral rock formations an unforgettable sight! (This happens to be one of the most exciting dive spots in the Pacific, so let us know in advance if you'd prefer to scuba dive today.) Later, we'll head onto the dry land of Caño Island and hike through evergreen forest to a viewing point overlooking the island and Pacific coastline to the north and south. The island is also a significant archaeological site where numerous perfectly formed rock spheres have been found dating back to Pre-Colombian times. Tonight we'll have our final dinner in Costa Rica surrounded by the rainforest.

ACCOMMODATION: *Casa Corcovado, Osa Peninsula (B,L,D)*

WEDNESDAY

Jungle boat and fly to San José, depart

Today is the last day of your Macaw trip in Costa Rica with us. This morning we'll board a jungle boat and return to the airstrip where we'll take a short flight back to the central highlands outside San José. If 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 very best Costa Rica has to offer – world-class outdoor activities, fantastic scenery and friendly people. (B)

Pura vida!

Specific Information – Macaw

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 after 4pm. 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 SOUTHAMERICA representative will meet you at the

airport at 2pm and take you to your accommodation and 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: We'll be flying back to San José's domestic airport from the Osa Peninsula on the last day of your trip, so you can book a flight departing any time after 4pm that day. If you're staying on in San José we can help you with extra hotel accommodation.



General Information

We've included trip-specific details in the Specific Information section at the end of each itinerary. This is also where you can find details on recommended flights for the start and the end of your trip.

ACCOMMODATION: Our trips focus on getting you outside for the best adventure activities in the most stunning parts of South America. The accommodation we choose is clean and comfortable, but it's not a tour of the fanciest hotels in South America! Some of the places we stay – such as Hotel Celaje in Costa Rica – are quite luxurious and other places – like the mountain lodges in Patagonia – are very basic, but truly spectacular.

From time to time, we might stay in places other than those specified in the itinerary - but we'll let you know before you go.

FITNESS: We've designed our trips to be challenging, fun and outdoor oriented – none of our trips are passive scenic tours – so you'll need a reasonable level of fitness to enjoy yourself. Age and experience are not important; 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. Getting in a few short hikes with a day pack or a gym class before your trip is always a good idea.

EXPERIENCE: You don't need lots of outdoor experience to take our trips. Our trips allow you to make the most of South America's outdoor environment, culture and history regardless of your experience. Our trip leaders are highly trained and experienced outdoor guides and they'll look after you. Experience is not as important as having a 'can do' attitude and being willing to give things a go. We manage the level of commitment to suit your experience, and have an impeccable safety record.

FLEXIBILITY: South America is a developing part of the world and we won't tell you that everything runs like clockwork. What we can say is that we are experienced adventure travel leaders and we know how to keep things operating smoothly, even when conditions are challenging. That's why we're here! You'll find your trip even more enjoyable if you remember to bring flexibility, an open mind and a sense of humour with you.

INCLUDED: Our trip fares are all shown in US dollars so our guests from all over the world can more easily relate prices to their own currencies. You can join us for shorter periods of time for most trips. The fares quoted on each itinerary include taxes. The trip fare includes just about everything, specifically:

- All guiding services. We have an experienced trip leader with every trip and have a specialist local guide on many of our excursions for extra local knowledge.
- Comfortable accommodation for the entire trip. We can also organise pre- and post-trip accommodation for you if you let us know.
- Breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D), except on our *Tortuga* trip where some dinners are not included, and during your free days on our *Jaguar* and *Tucan* trips when most people like to check out the local restaurants on their own.
- All drinking water. (Alcohol and other drinks are not included.)
- All hiking, snorkelling, rafting, canoeing, sea kayaking, hiking, biking and jungle activities as described in the itinerary, excluding optional activities as noted. No activities are compulsory, and nor will your trip be less awesome if you choose to sit out any of the activities.
- Tips for local activity guides, drivers and boat captains are taken care of by ACTIVE SOUTH AMERICA, except for Inca Trail guides and porters on our *Jaguar* trip.
- Transport including buses, boats, trains and some flights.

NOT INCLUDED: This is your holiday and we are serious about not nickel-and-diming you. On a couple of the trips you'll have one or two meals to cover, drinks and the cost of extra activities if you choose them. In some destinations you may have to cover your departure tax when you leave the airport. You'll probably feel like tipping your guide at the end of a fabulous time too. Other than that, everything's taken care of – you won't be pulling out your wallet every few minutes on your ACTIVE SOUTH AMERICA trip!

ITINERARY UPDATES: We update our printed itineraries each year. Please check our website for the most up-to-date itineraries and pricing (this one is valid to April 2011).

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