

Quetzal Costa Rica



Visit nesting sea turtles • Raft Pacuare River • Hike Tortuguero Hill and Monteverde National Park • Cycle Lake Arenal • Soak in Baldi Hot Springs • Sea kayak Tortuguero Canals and Tortuga Island • Snorkel at Curu Nature Reserve • Discover San José

11 days: San José–San José

Fare: US\$3499

Season: May–November

On this trip you'll hike, bike and paddle into the heart of Costa Rica's exuberant green environment. Paddling is a real highlight on the Quetzal – increased rainfall in the mountains provides us with an exciting rafting trip downriver, and this is the only time of year when you can sea kayak to Tortuguero National Park to see nesting sea turtles up close. You'll hike around the constantly erupting Arenal Volcano and cycle the fringes of beautiful Lake Arenal at its base. You'll hike through Monteverde Cloud Forest and visit a local coffee plantation before we make our way down to the Pacific coast, where you'll snorkel with tropical fish and paddle a sea kayak to idyllic Tortuga Island. While much of Costa Rica experiences heavy rain during the "wet season" when we run the Quetzal trip, we'll take you to areas that are truly at their best at this time of year. Your trip starts and ends in San José, Costa Rica's capital city.

DAY-TO-DAY ITINERARY

SATURDAY

Arrive San José

Your trip begins in San José. 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 to take you to your accommodation. Once you arrive, 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 and Caribbean Sea, gives it a mild, spring-like climate. In the evening you'll meet up with your trip leader and the rest of the group for a full briefing and a delicious *tico* dinner!

ACCOMMODATION: *Fleur de Lys Hotel, San José (D)*

SUNDAY

Raft Pacuare River

An early start this morning sees us leaving the city behind and driving 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 we take out, we'll continue on to the quaint Caribbean lowland town of Guápiles for the night.

ACCOMMODATION: *Guápiles accommodations, Guápiles (B,L,D)*

MONDAY

Sea kayak Tortuguero, Mawamba Lodge

This morning we'll take a short drive to Rio Suerte to start an incredible day of sea kayaking. We'll navigate the lazy waters of the Tortuguero canals, past banana plantations and wild jungle, down to the confluence of the Rio Penitencia. Tortuguero National Park is the most significant breeding ground for sea turtles in the Caribbean. Six of the world's eight species of sea turtle nest in Costa Rica and four of these lay their eggs in Tortuguero. We'll keep our eyes peeled for howler monkeys, sloths, tropical birds and iguanas as we paddle through lush primary rainforest. The mighty tarpon and shy manatee (aka sea cow) can also be found in the waters surrounding Tortuguero, so we'll hopefully see some amazing sea life too! We'll come ashore at the luxurious Mawamba Lodge, where we'll have the chance to relax in our hammocks and listen to the sounds of the jungle. This afternoon you can hike the miles of beautiful beach and nature trails or relax on the deck overlooking the Caribbean Sea.

ACCOMMODATION: *Mawamba Lodge, Tortuguero (B,L,D)*

TUESDAY

Visit sea turtles, hike Tortuguero Hill

We'll rise early this morning for a walk along the beach in search of the sea turtles this area is named after. If we're lucky, we'll have the chance to see the famous green sea turtles arrive on the beach and lay their eggs – an incredible experience! Then we'll return to the lodge for breakfast before heading off to hike through virgin rainforest up Tortuguero Hill. The abundance of wildlife in this area will take your breath away and our trip leaders are experts at finding the monkeys, reptiles, birds and other wildlife hidden in the thick jungle. When we return, we'll have the afternoon free to relax by the pool or soak in the sun at the beach.

ACCOMMODATION: *Mawamba Lodge, Tortuguero (B,L,D)*

WEDNESDAY

Depart Tortuguero, Baldi Hot Springs

This morning we'll leave Tortuguero by motorboat. Then it's back to conventional transport for the drive to Fortuna, a small town at the foot of the mighty Arenal Volcano, that has been constantly erupting for over a decade! We'll spend the afternoon at the incredible Thermo Mineral Baldi. This lavish complex of 16 hot pools and amazing landscaped gardens will be the backdrop for a typical *tico* dinner. On a clear night you'll enjoy spectacular night-time views of the volcano, which often glows orange with fresh lava flow from its crater.

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

Phil: "Tortuguero National Park is incredible, both for its ecological significance and stunning scenery. It's a special place, rich in biodiversity and amazing rainforest, so to explore it by foot and by sea kayak is a really cool and unique way to get up close and personal with its amazing creatures - I just love it!"

THURSDAY

Hike Arenal National Park to La Fortuna waterfall

This morning we'll set off for a day of hiking through the lush rainforest of Arenal National Park to the crater of a nearby dormant volcano. We begin by hiking through typical *tico* farmland, before entering stunning virgin rainforest canopy as it encloses the trail. Cascading waterfalls, brilliant rainforest flowers and the call of howler monkeys in the treetops make this a memorable hike. Our hike ends at 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!

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

FRIDAY

Cycle Lake Arenal, Monteverde

This morning we'll cycle around the edge of Lake Arenal. After an early breakfast, we'll begin riding under the rainforest canopy as we follow the shores of the lake. You'll be greeted by a cacophony of toucan calls, howler monkeys and other wildlife sounds. 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)

SATURDAY

Hike Monteverde Cloud Forest, free afternoon

Today we'll explore some of the most intriguing forest trails in Central America accompanied by a specialist local nature guide who will interpret the flora and fauna of the region for us. Tucked in a highland valley of the Costa Rican mountains, Monteverde offers a surreal hiking experience with stunning waterfalls, lush forest canopy,

and plenty of native animals ducking in and out of the mist if you have sharp eyes! 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 at Monteverde – you'll find everything from canopy tours to horse riding and 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)

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

SUNDAY

Visit coffee plantation, explore Montezuma

Today we'll continue down to the tropical warmth of the Pacific lowlands where we'll hit the Pacific Ocean. We'll stop at a local coffee plantation on the way to learn a little bit about the processes of coffee making in Costa Rica (and of course, have a chance to try some of their fine brew!), before making our way to Montezuma, a laid-back coastal village surrounded by nature reserve. This remote township is known for its history as a hippie town during the 60s, as well as for its sprawling white-sand beaches. The area also has beautiful rivers, waterfalls, rainforest, rocky points and tidal pools – perfect for exploring! Tonight we'll stay on the Nicoya Peninsula, in charming bungalows right on the beach and 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, enjoy a stroll on the beach, swim in the beautiful calm waters, or just hang out on the beach and watch the sun go down.

ACCOMMODATION: Hotel Celaje, Montezuma (B,L,D)

"Our Quezatal trip was really well organised and well planned, showing us Costa Rica in a way we would not have otherwise experienced – it's warmth, friendliness and beauty. ACTIVE did such a great job and it meant that we could cram the right mix of fun, adventure and relaxing without worrying about a thing."

Rajen Sheth (London, UK) August 2008

MONDAY

Sea kayak and snorkel Tortuga Island, return to San José

We have a big day today. This morning we'll paddle our sea kayaks across to Tortuga Island, a short distance offshore from the Curu Nature Reserve. After a 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. This 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 hundreds of varieties of fish in crystal clear

waters. In the afternoon we'll head back to the mainland to our hotel just outside San José where we'll enjoy our final evening together in Costa Rica.

ACCOMMODATION: Local hotel near San José (B,L,D)

TUESDAY

San José, depart

Today is the last day of your *Quetzal* 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 – 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 trip leader 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. (B)

Pura vida!

Specific Information – Quetzal

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 the 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 the 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.

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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