

FREE TRAVEL ITINERARY · ETRAVELS EVERYWHERE

7-Day *Costa Rica* Adventure Itinerary

San Jose → Arenal Volcano → Monteverde Cloud Forest → Manuel Antonio · Full day-by-day guide

7 DAYS 3 REGIONS 2 RELAXATION DAYS FREE DOWNLOAD

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OVERVIEW

Your Costa Rica Adventure at a Glance

Costa Rica is the most biodiverse destination per square mile in the world — and this 7-day itinerary covers the three most iconic regions in the country. You will experience an active volcano, zip-line through cloud forest, white-water raft a jungle river, spot sloths and monkeys in the wild, and finish with Pacific coast beach days. Top accommodation recommendations: **Nayara Tented Camp** or **Arenal Observatory Lodge** (Arenal, volcano views), **Belmar Hotel** (Monteverde, cloud forest views), and **Si Como No Resort** or **Arenas del Mar** (Manuel Antonio, jungle-to-beach luxury).

ARENAL LODGES

Nayara Tented Camp •
Arenal Observatory Lodge

MONTEVERDE

Belmar Hotel

MANUEL ANTONIO

Si Como No • Arenas del Mar

DAY 1 Arrival & Transfer to Arenal

MORNING

Fly into **San Jose Juan Santamaria International Airport (SJO)**. Costa Rica is a short 3-hour flight from Miami, 5 hours from New York. Collect your bags and meet your private transfer driver — we strongly recommend a private shuttle over rental cars for first-time visitors. The 3.5-hour drive to Arenal passes through the central highlands, coffee plantations, and the stunning Lake Arenal.

AFTERNOON

Arrive at your Arenal jungle lodge in early afternoon. Check in and take your first look at **Arenal Volcano** — a perfect symmetrical cone rising 5,400 feet above the surrounding jungle. On clear days the summit is visible from your room or pool. Spend the afternoon at your lodge's pool, exploring the jungle paths on the property, and spotting wildlife. Toucans, hummingbirds, and howler monkeys are common on arrival day. No agenda — just arrive and breathe in the jungle air.

EVENING

Dinner at your lodge restaurant — most Arenal lodges offer outstanding farm-to-table Costa Rican cuisine. **Gallo pinto** (rice and beans), fresh plantains, hearts of palm salad, and local tilapia are staples. After dinner, soak in the lodge's outdoor hot springs with the volcano lit against the night sky. This is one of the most memorable evenings in all of Central America.

Advisor Tip: Book your Arenal hot springs experience in advance. **Tabacon Grand Spa Thermal Resort** has the best natural hot springs in Costa Rica — fed directly by geothermal water from the volcano. Evening access (\$60 per person) is worth every cent.

DAY 2 Arenal — Zip-Lining & Hanging Bridges

MORNING

Early morning **hanging bridges walk** through the Arenal cloud forest. The **Mistico Arenal Hanging Bridges Park** has 16 bridges — 6 hanging suspension bridges and 10 fixed bridges — weaving through the treetop canopy at up to 160 feet above the forest floor. Morning is the absolute best time for wildlife spotting. Guides identify birds, sloths, howler monkeys, and butterflies. The mist in the jungle at 7:00am with a volcano behind you is a scene from another world.

AFTERNOON

Canopy zip-line tour with **Sky Adventures Arenal** or **Desafio Adventure Company**. The Arenal zip-line courses run through primary rainforest canopy with the volcano as a backdrop on every cable. Most courses have 10 to 14 cables with the longest stretching over 1,000 meters. The **Superman cable** — body horizontal, face down — is the most exhilarating 60 seconds in Costa Rica adventure sports. Absolutely do this.

EVENING

Return to Tabacon or your lodge hot springs for a recovery soak after an active day. Your muscles will thank you. Dinner at **Don Rufino Restaurant** in La Fortuna town — the most celebrated restaurant in the Arenal region with an outstanding wood-fired steak and fresh ceviche. La Fortuna's main street has excellent local restaurants, ice cream shops, and a very welcoming evening atmosphere.

DAY 3 White Water Rafting & Arenal Waterfall

MORNING

White water rafting on the Sarapiquí River — one of the best rafting rivers in Central America. The Class III to IV rapids are thrilling without being inaccessible to beginners. **Desafio Adventures** runs the best-guided trip, departing at 7:30am. The 2-hour float passes through primary jungle with chances to spot toucans, river otters, and basilisk lizards running on the water surface. A full breakfast is typically included before and after the rafting experience.

AFTERNOON

Visit the **La Fortuna Waterfall** — a 230-foot cascade of glacial cold water pouring directly from the side of Arenal Volcano into a jungle pool. The 500-step descent to the base is steep but absolutely worth it. Swimming in the pool at the base of the falls is one of Costa Rica's most iconic experiences. The surrounding rainforest is alive with butterflies, birds, and the sound of the jungle. Allow 2 hours here.

EVENING

Final Arenal evening. Optional: **night wildlife tour** with a local guide through the jungle to spot red-eyed tree frogs, kinkajous, armadillos, and tarantulas by flashlight. This 90-minute guided night

walk is one of the most unique experiences in the entire itinerary and costs approximately \$30 per person. Alternatively, enjoy a quiet last night in the hot springs under the stars.

Advisor Tip: The La Fortuna Waterfall trail is steep and the stairs can be slippery — wear proper hiking shoes, not sandals. The cold water pool at the bottom is a shocking and wonderful refresher after the descent.

DAY 4 Transfer to Monteverde Cloud Forest

MORNING

The most dramatic transfer in Costa Rica: the **jeep-boat-jeep** crossing of Lake Arenal. A 4WD jeep takes you to the lake shore, a small boat crosses the stunning lake with Arenal Volcano perfectly reflected in the water behind you, and another jeep waits on the far shore to drive you up to Monteverde. This 3-hour journey is an adventure in itself and avoids the 4-hour road route.

AFTERNOON

Arrive in **Monteverde** and check into your cloud forest lodge. The immediate difference from Arenal is striking — Monteverde sits at 4,600 feet elevation in perpetual mist, the temperature drops 15 degrees, and the landscape is lush, moody, and extraordinary. Afternoon visit to a **local coffee or chocolate plantation tour** — both are grown right in Monteverde and the farm-to-cup experience is genuinely fascinating and delicious.

EVENING

Dinner at **Sofia Restaurant** in Santa Elena — the best restaurant in the Monteverde area with outstanding New Latin cuisine and a warm, unpretentious atmosphere. Try the hearts of palm ceviche, the black bean soup, and the passion fruit dessert. The village of Santa Elena has a lovely evening energy — small craft shops, local art galleries, and ice cream shops stay open late.

DAY 5 Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve

MORNING

Guided morning walk through the **Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Reserve** — one of the most important cloud forests on earth, protecting over 2,500 plant species, 400 bird species, and 100 mammal species. A certified naturalist guide is essential here and completely transforms what you see. The **resplendent quetzal** — one of the most spectacular birds on earth — is found here and April through June is peak sighting season. Even if you are not a birdwatcher, seeing a quetzal is a life moment.

AFTERNOON

Afternoon at leisure in Monteverde — take the **Sky Walk suspension bridges** at your own pace, or visit the **Butterfly Garden** and **Hummingbird Gallery**, where dozens of species of hummingbirds feed in the open garden centimeters from your face. Visit the **Monteverde Cheese Factory** for locally produced cheese and the best fresh cheese ice cream you will ever taste.

EVENING

Farewell Monteverde dinner. Tonight is a wonderful opportunity for a cooking class at a local family farm — several farms in the area run 2-hour classes where you make traditional gallo pinto, plantain chips, and ceviche from scratch. It is one of the most personal and memorable experiences in the entire itinerary.

Monteverde moves at its own pace — cloudy, quiet, and alive. No rushing, no schedule. The forest reveals itself to those who slow down. Walk slowly. Listen for the birds. Breathe the

DAY 6 Manuel Antonio — Pacific Coast Arrival

MORNING

Private transfer from Monteverde to **Manuel Antonio** on the Pacific coast — approximately 4 hours through stunning mountain descents to the coast. The dramatic elevation drop from 4,600 feet cloud forest to sea level beach in 4 hours is one of the most visually extraordinary road trips in Central America. The temperature rises, the jungle thickens, the air becomes tropical again, and then suddenly the Pacific Ocean appears ahead of you.

AFTERNOON

Check into your beachfront jungle lodge. **Si Como No** and **Arenas del Mar** are both carved into the hillside jungle above the beach — you walk through the forest to reach the sand. Spend the afternoon at the resort pool overlooking the Pacific, or walk down to **Playa Biesanz** — a secluded beach accessible through the jungle with calm swimming conditions and almost no crowds.

EVENING

Pacific coast sunsets are completely different from Arenal or Monteverde — blazing orange and red over open ocean. Watch it from your hotel terrace with a local craft beer. Dinner at **La Cantina** or **Emilio's Cafe** in Manuel Antonio town — fresh grilled whole red snapper, coconut rice, and fried plantains served on the beach with the sound of waves. This is everything a Costa Rica beach evening should be.

DAY 7 Manuel Antonio National Park & Departure

MORNING

Early morning entry to **Manuel Antonio National Park** — the most visited national park in Costa Rica and one of the most biologically rich small parks in the world. Arrive at 7:00am when the gates open. The park contains four stunning beaches, primary rainforest, coral reef snorkeling, and extraordinary wildlife density. Within 30 minutes you will see **white-faced capuchin monkeys** walking directly at eye level in the trees above the path, **two-toed sloths** sleeping in cecropia trees, and massive **squirrel monkeys** leaping overhead.

AFTERNOON

Final afternoon at **Playa Manuel Antonio** inside the national park — one of the most beautiful beaches in Central America, flanked by jungle on both sides. Snorkel the coral reef directly offshore, bodysurf the Pacific waves, or simply lie on the sand and watch the monkeys walk past. This is your final afternoon in Costa Rica. Make it count — order a fresh coconut from a beach vendor and sit with the Pacific at your feet.

EVENING

Transfer to **San Jose Airport (SJO)** — approximately 3 hours from Manuel Antonio. Most overnight flights to the US depart between 9:00pm and midnight. Pack a Monteverde coffee, a bottle of local guaro liquor, and as many memories as you can carry. **Pura Vida** — pure life. Costa Rica's national phrase and the only goodbye worth saying.

Advisor Tip: Manuel Antonio National Park has a daily visitor cap — book your entrance tickets online at least 48 hours in advance. The park closes on Tuesdays. A certified guide dramatically increases wildlife sightings and is worth the \$30 to \$50 fee.

WHAT TO PACK

- Waterproof hiking boots or trail shoes
- Lightweight quick-dry clothing
- Reef-safe sunscreen
- Strong insect repellent (DEET-based)
- Small dry bag for electronics
- Binoculars for wildlife viewing
- Rain jacket — it rains fast in the jungle

COSTA RICA TRAVEL TIPS

- No visa required for US passport holders
- Currency is Costa Rican Colon — USD accepted
- Book all activities in advance in high season
- Travel insurance is essential — activities are active
- Tipping 10% is standard in restaurants
- Private transfers safer than rental cars
- Dry season: December to April is ideal

Ready to Book Your Costa Rica Adventure?

We have booked hundreds of Costa Rica trips and have direct relationships with Nayara, Si Como No, and Arenas del Mar. We handle every transfer, every lodge, and every activity booking — free consultation, no obligation.

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