

# BEST OF COSTA RICA

MARCH 20 – APRIL 1, 2018

© 2017

*Often called "the Switzerland of Central America," Costa Rica is a small, stable country with a prosperous middle class, fine educational system, and spectacular highland terrain. For its size, it is one of the richest countries in the world for birds, with over 850 known species from a small area the size of West Virginia. Costa Rica boasts the finest national park and reserve system in Latin America, protecting examples of all major habitats and the accompanying flora and fauna. Because of this, it has become one of the premier birding destinations in the world! This tour offers an excellent introduction to the joys of Neotropical birding, numerous regional specialties, and a chance to view such Neotropical mammals as monkeys, coatimundi and javelina.*

*The Costa Rican landscape is remarkably diverse, and each of the four major regions we will visit forms a natural boundary for bird distribution. The ranchlands of the dry northwest represent the southern limit for birds of the dry forests of Pacific northern Central America. The humid Caribbean lowlands and foothills are directly linked to the great lowland forests of South America, with many rainforest birds spilling across the Panama "land bridge" to reach their northern limit here. The southern Pacific coast is an isolated area of high rainfall, and a number of species are found only here, reaching their northern limit in the Carara region. Most importantly, much of Costa Rica consists of a large highland mass dominated by immense volcanoes and rugged cordilleras. The distinctive birdlife here is completely different from that of the lowlands and includes a high number of endemics (birds found nowhere else in the world except adjacent Panama).*

*This time of year is a great time to bird Costa Rica, as bird activity is high and the weather is good. As we explore each of these major habitats we will search for many of Central America's most spectacular birds. At the top of the list must be the magnificent Resplendent Quetzal, but there are many more, including Great Curassow, Black Guan, Scarlet and Great Green macaws, over 30 species of hummingbirds, nine beautiful trogons, toucans and aracarís, motmots, Prong-billed Barbet, Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, Snowy Cotinga, manakins, woodcreepers and ovenbirds, and tanagers in abundance. The list seems endless! Join us this "spring" in Costa Rica for a truly unforgettable birding experience.*

**PLEASE NOTE:** This tour is designed for VERY early morning departures, with some breakfast times as early as 5:00 a.m. as it gets light early here! On days when we are not traveling we will return to the lodges for an afternoon break before going out again.

**March 20, Day 1: Arrival in San José, Costa Rica.** You should plan your flights to arrive in San José Juan Santamaria International Airport (airport code SJO) any time today. After clearing customs and immigration, you will be met by our ground operator and transferred to our hotel. Because most flights arrive San Jose this evening, there are no functions scheduled for today and you are on your own for dinner.

NIGHT: Doubletree Cariari by Hilton Hotel, San José

**March 21, Day 2: To Bosque de Paz.** As we begin our journey, this morning we will travel across the heavily-settled Meseta Central and over a high ridge before descending into a lush and beautiful mountain valley to Bosque de Paz, a lovely private reserve of 4500 acres (1800 hectares) set in the heart of the subtropical zone. Here the climate is cool and damp, the forest constantly misted by clouds rising upslope. Undoubtedly the hummingbird feeders will grab our attention first, and amidst the commoner species we may find Green Hermit and Magenta-throated Woodstar. The forest is nearby and in the epiphyte-laden trees here we will seek such montane specialties as Emerald Toucanet, Prong-billed Barbet, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Golden-bellied Flycatcher, Ochraceous Wren, Black-faced Solitaire, Mountain Robin, Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, and Silver-throated Tanager. More widespread species include Mountain Elaenia, Slate-throated Redstart and Common Chlorospingus.

NIGHT: Bosque de Paz

**March 22, Day 3: Bosque de Paz Area.** Not far above Bosque de Paz, a winding country road climbs to higher elevations on a steep ridge. Most of the slopes here are still covered in cool and wet temperate forest, popularly called “cloud forest”, and today we will explore this habitat. Some of the finest birds of Central America inhabit this region, including Black Guan, Collared Trogon, Streak-chested Treehunter, Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Spangle-cheeked Tanager and Black-thighed Grosbeak. The enchanting songs of Black-faced Solitaires and nightingale-thrushes sound through the forest, while Gray-breasted Wood-wrens, Three-striped Warblers and others lurk in the understory. Occasional raptors are spotted over the ridges, including Great Black-Hawk and the rare Solitary Eagle, and here we will have our first chance for Resplendent Quetzal, considered by many the most beautiful bird in the world.

NIGHT: Bosque de Paz

**March 23, Day 4: Bosque de Paz to Villa Lapas.** After a final morning in the cloud forest at Bosque de Paz, we will drive down into the dry Pacific lowlands to Villa Lapas, our base for exploring famous Carara National Park, located just minutes away. The hotel is situated along a forested stream and is beautifully landscaped, with an abundance of birds right around the grounds. The variety of flycatchers is especially noteworthy and we should have many chances to study and learn them here.

NIGHT: Villa Lapas, Carara

**March 24-25, Days 5-6: Carara National Park and nearby.** Established in 1978, Carara is located near the Pacific coast in the transition zone between the dry northwest and the very wet southwest. This large park is virtually the only tall tropical moist forest remaining in the Pacific lowlands and is therefore an especially important faunal reserve. We have two full days to explore this very birdy region. At first, we will watch for large birds sitting up along the forest edge, later walking the forest trails. The reserve abounds with birds, but it is most famous for its relict population of Scarlet Macaws. This is our only chance to see this fabulous, much-persecuted species. At daybreak raucous pairs majestically fly from their roosts to their feeding grounds, sometimes landing where we can watch them in the scopes.

Carara abounds with birds large and small, an interesting blend of species from both regions. Especially noteworthy are the dozen or so species endemic to the wet region south of here, including Baird's Trogon, Fiery-billed Aracari, Golden-naped Woodpecker, Black-hooded Antshrike, Orange-collared Manakin, and Riverside Wren. All have extremely small world ranges that are threatened by deforestation, and all can be hard to locate. Among the many other forest dwellers possible here are Slaty-tailed, Black-throated, Black-headed, and Gartered trogons; Rufous-tailed Jacamar; Pale-billed Woodpecker; Plain Xenops; Cocoa Woodcreeper; Barred Antshrike; Dot-winged Antwren; Dusky and Chestnut-backed antbirds; Streak-chested Antpitta; Red-capped Manakin; a remarkable array of flycatchers from large to small; Rose-throated Becard; Rufous-breasted and Black-bellied wrens; and Gray-headed and White-shouldered tanagers. Raptors are diverse in this blend zone.

One afternoon we will take a relaxing boat trip on the nearby Tarcoles River and estuary, perhaps finding Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Wood Stork, Common Black-Hawk, Collared Plover, Turquoise-browed Motmot and several of kingfishers, as well as a good variety of other water and shorebirds.

NIGHTS: Villa Lapas, Carara

**March 26, Day 7: Carara area to the Sarapiquí lowlands.** This morning we will travel from the Pacific lowlands back onto the Meseta Central, then descending the Caribbean slope between Barba and Irazu Volcanos. This is one of the wettest regions of Central America, a lush and scenic wonderland of rushing water and deep valleys, much of it still covered in forest. We will spend part of our day in this environment at the La Paz Waterfall Garden. The hummingbird feeders here attract up to 10 species, including Green-crowned Brilliant, Violet Sabrewing, Coppery-headed Emerald, Black-bellied Hummingbird, White-bellied Mountain-gem and Magenta-throated Woodstar, and should keep us well entertained. There are also plenty of other birds around the feeders and forest edge, including Prong-billed Barbet, Red-faced Spinetail, flycatchers, Silver-throated and several other dazzling tanagers, Yellow-thighed and Sooty-faced finches, and a nice assortment of more widespread birds. We will arrive at La Quinta, our headquarters for exploring the Sarapiquí lowlands, in the late afternoon, likely in time to enjoy the many birds at their feeders.

NIGHT: La Quinta de Sarapiquí, Sarapiquí

**March 27-28, Days 8-9: La Selva Field Station.** We will have two full days to bird the humid tropical lowlands of northeastern Costa Rica, emphasizing the world-famous La Selva Biological Station. This region, although now mostly cleared and settled, harbors the richest avifauna in the country and birds are generally conspicuous. The great diversity of habitats here includes tall lowland rainforest, second-growth of varying ages, overgrown plantations, successional thickets and damp pastures. Just a few of the special birds possible are Great and Little tinamous; Green Ibis; Crested Guan and even Great Curassow; Semiplumbeous Hawk; Gray-necked Wood-Rail; Great Green Macaw; Mealy, White-crowned and Brown-hooded parrots; Slaty-tailed and Gartered trogons; Amazon Kingfisher; Broad-billed and Rufous motmots; White-whiskered Puffbird; Keel-billed and Yellow-throated (Chestnut-mandibled) toucans; Collared Aracari; Chestnut-colored Woodpecker; Black-striped Woodcreeper; Great Antshrike; White-collared Manakin; Black-capped Pygmy-Tyrant; Long-tailed Tyrant; Stripe-breasted and Black-throated wrens; Shining Honeycreeper; Montezuma Oropendola; Scarlet-rumped Cacique; Dusky-faced Tanager; and Orange-billed Sparrow. The more open country harbors such non-forest species as Striped Cuckoo; Olive-throated Parakeet; Olive-crowned Yellowthroat; Crimson-collared Tanager; Black-headed Saltator; Black-cowled Oriole; and various seed-eating birds.

NIGHTS: La Quinta de Sarapiquí, Sarapiquí

**March 29, Day 10: Braulio Carillo National Park.** After leaving the Sarapiquí lowlands this morning, we will briefly bird the foothills in Braulio Carillo National Park, a huge area of upper tropical and subtropical rainforest. Some of Costa Rica's least-known and special birds have been recorded here, including such rarely-seen species as Snowcap, Black-crested Coquette, Lattice-tailed Trogon, Rufous-winged Woodpecker, Black-crowned Antpitta, White-ruffed Manakin, and Tawny-capped Euphonia. Here we may also encounter a stellar line-up of tanagers that includes such gems as the Emerald, Silver-throated, Speckled, Black-and-yellow, Olive and Tawny-crested tanagers. Though our time here is limited, and the birding can be tough, almost anything is possible in this scenic area.

In the afternoon, after a picnic lunch, we will depart for the cool heights of Cerro de la Muerte, descending steeply from the top of this high ridge to a deep mountain valley, where our lodge sits amidst a beautiful flower-filled garden.

NIGHT: Savegre Lodge

**March 30, Day 11: Cerro de La Muerte.** On our final full day in the field we will bird the temperate (montane) forests on massive Cerro de la Muerte, which reaches over 10,000 feet above sea level on the Pan-Am highway. Large areas on the slopes of these mountains are still clothed in magnificent oak forest, which harbors a distinctive high-elevation avifauna with many endemics.

Among the birds that we may see today are Sulphur-winged Parakeet, Fiery-throated Hummingbird, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Ruddy Treerunner, Buffy Tuftedcheek, Black-billed and Ruddy-capped Nightingale-Thrushes, Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher, Yellow-winged Vireo, Flame-throated and Black-cheeked warblers, Collared Redstart, Flame-colored Tanager, Yellow-thighed Finch, Slaty Flowerpiercer, Black-thighed Grosbeak and Sooty-capped Bush-Tanager. Most of these species are found only in the isolated mountain forests of Costa Rica and adjacent Panama, and few of them range below 6000 feet. Here we will also have our best chance to enjoy Costa Rica's glamour bird, the Resplendent Quetzal. Numerous pairs nest in this region and they sometimes even frequent the fruiting trees right behind the lodge. The lodge landscaping attracts hummingbirds in abundance, including Volcano, Scintillant and Magnificent hummingbirds, and White-throated Mountain-gems, while American Dippers and Torrent Tyrannulets play in the nearby stream.

NIGHT: Savegre Lodge

**March 31, Day 12: Savegre to San Jose.** At the highest elevations lies the stunted vegetation and dense bamboo thickets of the subalpine zone. Botanically this formation is the northernmost extension of the Andean paramo, and several very localized endemics of restricted world range are found here, including Volcano Hummingbird, Black-capped Flycatcher, Timberline Wren, Sooty Robin, Black-and-yellow Silky-Flycatcher, Large-footed and Peg-billed finches, and Volcano Junco. We will search for them and other mountain birds this morning, returning to San Jose after lunch, our grand tour of Costa Rica complete.

NIGHT: Doubletree Cariari by Hilton Hotel, San Jose

**April 1, Day 13: Departure for Home.** The tour ends this morning with a transfer to the San José airport for flights departing before noon today. Transfers for flights departing at other times can be arranged in advance at an additional charge. When booking your return flight please keep in mind that transfers will depart from the hotel three hours before the scheduled departing flight time. In other words, if you schedule an early morning flight, your departure from the hotel will be very early.

**EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS:** Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

**TOUR LEADERS: David Wolf and Mimi Wolf**

**David Wolf** is a senior member of the VENT staff and one of our most experienced tour leaders. After birding the U.S. and Mexico for over a decade, an interest in the wildlife of Africa led him to East Africa in 1975, where he spent over a year studying the birds and other wildlife of the African continent. Soon after his return to Texas he began leading Rockport Wildlife Weekends for VENT, at that time a new company, and he hasn't stopped leading tours since. In addition to Africa, David has extensive birding and tour-leading experience throughout the world, emphasizing North America, Africa, and the Neotropics, and has led over 60 previous tours to Costa Rica. He unites great birding skills with a wide-ranging interest in all aspects of natural history, which he shares readily with tour participants. David and his wife, Mimi, live on a small farm in Nacogdoches, Texas with assorted horses, cats, and dogs. They have two grown children, Matt and Elena, and are now the happy grandparents of Reimer and Ellison Rose, Matt and Tiffany's children, and Tycho Drahn, Elena's son.

**Mimi Wolf** is an accomplished birder, artist, horse breeder, and mother who lives in Nacogdoches, Texas. She has illustrated a number of bird books, including Steve Hilty's *Birds of Tropical America* and Roland Wauer's *A Birder's West Indies*, and her pen-and-ink sketches have appeared in many other publications. She has also exhibited her paintings, watercolors, prints, and other art in numerous shows. She is especially proud of her home-raised Supreme Champion Pinto Arabian stallion, Oshquah, who won National Championships in 1996 and 1998. Mimi has been an active birder for over 40 years, and has traveled widely and co-led tours in Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador, and around the southwestern United States. She holds a B.S. from Stephen F. Austin State University.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is **\$5,495** per person in double occupancy from San Jose, Costa Rica. This includes all meals from Breakfast on Day 2 to Breakfast on Day 13, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to San Jose and return, airport departure taxes, dinner on Day 1, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$720**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

**EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES:** In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

**FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The initial deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you would like to pay your initial deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay the initial deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard, Visa or American Express at the time of registration. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at [www.ventbird.com](http://www.ventbird.com)) should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

**PAYMENTS:** Initial tour deposits may be made by MasterCard, Visa, American Express, check, money order, or bank transfer. All other tour payments, including second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc., must be made by check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions. *We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.*

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$250*
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available

\*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person.

Upon cancellation of the transportation or travel services, where you, the customer, are not at fault and have not cancelled in violation of the terms and conditions of any of the contract for transportation or travel services, all sums paid to VENT for services not received by you will be promptly refunded by VENT to you unless you otherwise advise VENT in writing.

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE:** We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends *Travel Insured International* as our preferred insurance provider. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip.

**Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. Contact *Travel Insured International* (800-243-3174 or [www.travelinsured.com](http://www.travelinsured.com)) prior to registration for details. Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than *Travel Insured International*, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. ***Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be responsible for any air ticket penalties.***

**BAGGAGE:** We request participants limit their baggage to one medium-sized soft-side roller bag or duffelbag or suitcase, and one carry-on, if possible, as space in the vehicle will be limited. Extra luggage can be stored at our hotel in San José, if you so desire. Laundry can be done at all of the hotels at which we stay more than one night. As a precaution, we suggest you pack your travel documents, medications, toiletries, a change of clothes, and your binoculars in your carry-on bag.

**CLOTHING / CLIMATE:** As is the case for all of our tropical tours, lightweight field clothing is the norm for Costa Rica tours. Long-sleeved shirts, a hat, sunglasses, and a strong sunscreen are recommended for protection from the sun. Also, please be sure to have a pair of good water-resistant hiking boots or walking shoes and a second pair of lightweight shoes. Mudboots are not necessary. Generally, the weather will be warm to hot and humid (75 to 90 degrees). It will be cooler at several high-elevation locations (with temperatures perhaps as low as the low 50s), so a thermal top and warm sweater or jacket are essential for layering. Trails should not be so muddy at this season as to require rubber boots; water-resistant footgear is best. Please note that you must have a pair of shoes/boots of some kind to enter La Selva (sandals are not allowed). Do not forget to bring a small umbrella and/or poncho, as we may get caught out in mist or rain.

**DOCUMENTS:** A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Costa Rica is required. Visas are not required for entry by U.S. citizens. Non-U.S. citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions. You will be issued a tourist card by the airline on which you travel. Although no vaccinations are required for entry into Costa Rica, you may be asked to present proof of a current yellow fever vaccination if you have traveled recently in other countries within Latin America or Africa.

**EQUIPMENT:** You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good repair, along with a belt pack or day pack (for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, etc.). As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medication and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leader will have a spotting scope, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so. Pack a small flashlight, and an alarm clock. A small folding umbrella is also a good idea for mist and light rain.

**HEALTH:** If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B. A routine anti-malarial regimen is being recommended by the CDC. Please consult your physician.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta Georgia. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636), or you can check their website at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel). Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html) (click on travel health).

The drinking water is good everywhere that this tour goes in Costa Rica. We recommend that you bring a supply of aspirin or any other medication you think you might need during the trip. Immodium tablets are recommended for traveler's diarrhea.

**INSECT PROTECTION:** Chiggers are occasionally a problem in some areas. For prevention of bites, we recommend regular use of a repellent lotion (small plastic squeeze bottle) and a pump-style container of insect repellent that has close to 100% DEET. Topsy gel is useful in reducing irritation from stings or bites, and some cortisone creams are available without prescription. Also, "Flowers of Sulphur" powder has proven effective for deterring chiggers (ask your pharmacist).

**A Note About Chiggers:** This tour visits areas where chiggers are known to occur. Chiggers are tiny parasitic mites found in most warm weather areas of the southern United States and the world's tropics. They are especially numerous in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to other animals or humans who make contact with the grass as they pass by. Chiggers do not suck blood and the majority of the world's species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids, however, through a process in which a digestive enzyme is produced by the chigger which essentially liquefies the skin around the area where the chigger is attached. The chigger is not usually attached to the skin for more than a few hours before it either falls off or is knocked off. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area as a defense against the chigger's digestive enzyme. Though the chigger may be long gone, it is the presence of the hardened area, and the body's natural process of reabsorbing it that typically causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, like around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows.

Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

- Avoid walking, or standing in particular, in areas dominated by grass. These areas are where one is most likely to encounter chiggers.

- Tuck your pants into your socks to avoid direct skin-to-grass contact. Chiggers can find their way through clothing, but this is a standard and effective prevention technique commonly employed by many.
- Apply a cream-style insect repellent, such as “Cutters” to your body from the waist down BEFORE putting on your clothing.
- Spray your pants and socks with a spray repellent such as “Cutters” or “Off.” Repellants with high concentrations of DEET (70-100%) are most effective. You do not need to apply these to you skin, only to clothing. (Be careful as DEET will damage plastics and lens coatings). Repel Permanone is an odorless aerosol insecticide that offers perhaps the best defense against chiggers. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online. It should only be applied to clothes and allowed to dry before you dress. Never apply Permanone directly to the skin. Permethrin is known to be a highly toxic chemical to insects. It is the active ingredient in Permanone, but is present in a small amount (0.5%).
- Powdered sulfur applied to waist, bottoms of pants, sock and boots is also effective at repelling chiggers. However, be warned that clothes will retain the sulfur odor for several washings.
- Shower at the end of each day in the field. Use a washcloth to vigorously rub your legs, feet, and ankles.

By following these methods, you should be able to avoid all chigger bites, as well as tick bites. If, however, you are bitten by chiggers anyway, you can reduce or eliminate the symptoms by applying benzocaine or hydrocortisone creams, calamine lotion, After Bite, or any number of anti-itch products.

**MISCELLANEOUS:**

Departure Tax - now included in cost of air tickets with most major airlines.

Currency – US \$ are widely accepted, as are Visa and Mastercard, so there is no need to change dollars into Costa Rican colones.

Electricity – 110/220 volts (same as USA); two-pin plugs are standard.

Language – Spanish, although English is widely spoken.

Time – Central Standard Time

Internet Access – available at all locations (and generally, but not always, reliable).

**SUGGESTED READING:** A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

***Field Guides (Birds):***

Garrigues, Richard and Robert Dean, *The Birds of Costa Rica: A Field Guide*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007. Compact and complete, now the recommended field guide.

Stiles, Gary and Alexander Skutch. *A Guide to the Birds of Costa Rica*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990. The first field guide specifically for Costa Rica and still very useful, especially the text.

Ridgely, Robert S. *A Guide to the Birds of Panama*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Edition expanded to include Costa Rica and excellent for use here.

***Field Guides (other):***

DeVries, Philip. *The Butterflies of Costa Rica & Their Natural History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. Lovely guide to butterflies; but no longer easy to obtain.

Glassberg, Jeffrey. *A Swift Guide to the Butterflies of Mexico and Central America*. Sunstreak Books, 2007. The most practical guide to the butterflies of Costa Rica if this is one of your special interests.

Leenders, Twan. *A Guide to Amphibians and Reptiles of Costa Rica*. A Zona Tropical Publication; 2001.

Wainwright, Mark. *The Mammals of Costa Rica*. Comstock Published (a division of Cornell University Press), 2007. Excellent guide to the mammals.



**Multimedia:**

“Costa Rica Birds – Field Guide” by BirdingFieldGuides.com. A good birding app for this trip.

**General Introduction to the Tropics:**

- Forsyth, Adrian, and Ken Miyata. *Tropical Nature*. Scribner, 1987. Paperback available. Excellent chapters, very readable and informative. Written for the layman; highly recommended.
- Forsyth, Adrian, *Portraits of the Rainforest*. With photos by Michael and Pat Fogden. Camden East, ONT: Camden House, 1990. Stunning photos and a superb text by one of the best nature writers in the business.
- Hilty, Steven. *Birds of Tropical America*. Shelburne, VT: Chapters Publishing Ltd, 1994. An excellent, easy-to-read book on the ecology of neotropical birds. **Highly recommended**
- Kricher, John C. *A Neotropical Companion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. Good introduction to the tropics.

**Further Reading:**

- Janzen, Daniel H. (ed.). *Costa Rican Natural History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. An encyclopedia that contains a wealth of information on the plants and animals of Costa Rica, especially those that have been studied in the field; also has chapters on geology and soils, agriculture, etc. Recommended as a technical reference book.
- Perry, Donald. *Life Above the Jungle Floor*. Simon & Schuster, 1986. Out of Print, but still available. A popular book that tells much about life in the tropical rainforest, especially in the little-known canopy.
- Reid, Fiona A. *A Field Guide to the Mammals of Central America and Southeast Mexico*. Oxford University Press, 1997. Best mammal guide.
- Skutch, Alexander F. *A Bird Watcher's Adventures in Tropical America*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977. Fun reading from an eminent ornithologist resident in Costa Rica.
- Skutch, Alexander F. *A Naturalist in Costa Rica*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1971. Good general background in the tropics from a prolific and very readable author. Reprinted in 1992. Try [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com).

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect May 31, 2017 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.

CRB:20180320  
Rev: 05/25/17 - DW  
PNP: 05/30/17 – GL  
P: 06/02/17 – GL