



## TOUR INFORMATION FOR COSTA RICA in November

**These notes are designed to help you prepare for your tour. Please read carefully.**

**ENTERING COSTA RICA:** United Kingdom citizens will need a passport which is valid for six months beyond the intended length of stay. A visa is not required for stays of up to 90 days. Citizens of other countries should contact their nearest Costa Rican Embassy or Consulate for entry requirements.

You may be tempted by cheaper flights arriving in San José from the USA late in the evening. If you elect to arrive late in the evening of Day 1, please be aware that Day 2 birding will start early and you may only get a few hours' sleep. If you can't arrive before early evening, you may want to consider arriving a day early.

If you elect to fly via the USA you will need to apply for an **ESTA** (visa waiver). Having an ESTA is a mandatory requirement and applications should be made online at least 72 hours before departure via their website <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov> as although the majority of responses are immediate, it can take 72 hours for approval in some cases. There is a small fee to pay as a processing charge followed by a small fee when authorisation has been granted.

For further information, or if you don't have access to the internet, please contact the Embassy of the United States in London on 020 3608 6998. Citizens of other countries should contact their nearest US Embassy for entry requirements.

There is no risk of Yellow Fever transmission in Costa Rica, however there is a certification requirement if you are travelling from or via an infected country. Please click here for specific information: [http://travelhealthpro.org.uk/country/58/costa-rica#Vaccine\\_recommendations](http://travelhealthpro.org.uk/country/58/costa-rica#Vaccine_recommendations)

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport and air ticket with you when travelling abroad. They can prove invaluable in helping you get replacements if your originals are lost or stolen. Obviously you should keep the photocopies in a separate bag to the originals.

**INTRODUCTORY MEETING:** There will be an introductory meeting at 18.00 on Day 1 of the tour. This informal meeting allows the leader the opportunity to introduce everyone to each other and to let you know generally what to expect on the trip - pace of the tour, daily routine, etc.

**ARRIVING EARLY:** Many participants arrive a day or more early and find the hotel's beautiful, extensive garden and nearby habitats a delightful, relaxing place to ease into the bird life. The hotel can also book day tours to the cultural attractions around San José, including museums, a coffee plantation tour, and others. You may be tempted by convenient flights arriving into San José late the first evening. If you elect to arrive late in the evening of Day 1, please be aware that Day 2's birding will start early, and you may only get a few hours' sleep. It is possible to fly to Costa Rica via another European city and arrive into Costa Rica mid-afternoon however seats on these flights get booked very quickly so the fares are usually high.

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**LEAVING COSTA RICA:** The airport departure tax has recently been included in most airlines' tickets. If it's not included by your departing airline, it is currently USD \$28.00 per person, payment for which must be made in cash at the bank counter inside the airport before checking in for your flight (credit cards can be used but will be processed as cash advances). Either the leader or the ground agent who transfers you to the airport that morning can give you further direction if needed.

**TIME DIFFERENCE:** Costa Rica is six hours behind Greenwich Mean Time.

**CURRENCY:** The Costa Rican currency is the *colón*. Only U.S dollars are accepted for exchange. You may not need any local currency, as dollars are accepted by most of our lodges, but you may find it useful to have \$20 to \$50 dollars in local currency for small items, gifts, extra drinks, and services of a personal nature; for larger purchases, credit cards are widely accepted. Colones can be obtained at the currency exchange or through an ATM at the international airport (located in the luggage carousel hall before you pass through customs) and at most of our hotels.

**LANGUAGE:** The language of Costa Rica is Spanish. English-speakers are present in most hotels but are seldom encountered away from the hotels. The leader will speak at least passable Spanish. Even though you will almost certainly not need to converse in Spanish, you might consider bringing a small English-Spanish dictionary or phrase book.

**CLIMATE:** Costa Rica's climate varies with elevation. Temperatures will range from the 50s°F in the mountains to as high as the low 90s (but more typically low 80's) at lower elevations. San José, at an elevation of 3,800 feet (1160 m), can be cool, with evening lows in the upper 60's. Those of you arriving in the evening will want to wear a light sweater. There will almost certainly be some rain and, at higher elevations, temperatures will be cool and mist and/or rain is possible. Some tours experience more rain than others, especially in the eastern lowlands. Note that in the warm, humid lowlands, raincoats may produce as much moisture inside as they protect you from on the outside. Because of these conditions, an umbrella is a necessary birding accessory.

**ALTITUDE:** We will be at an elevation of 11,000 feet (3350 metres) briefly one day; otherwise our birding will be below 8,000 feet (2450 metres).

**PACE OF THE TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE:** Many days begin with breakfast at 05:30 followed by birding through until lunch. On other days breakfast is anywhere between 06:00 to 07:30, with optional dawn birding beforehand, and then birding through until lunch. On the longer travel days, during which we'll be making birding stops from the vehicle most of the day, we may arrive at our hotel around dark, a tiring pace for some. When we are at a hotel for multiple nights, there will be at least a mid-day break and afternoon birding; one can elect to relax at the hotel during these afternoons. There will be several night bird forays by foot and/or bus. Every day we have an hour or more off at the rooms before checklist and dinner.

The longest birding walks can be as long as 2½ miles (4km) round trip, but at a slow pace that will take most of the morning; a day's total walking could amount to 4 or even 5 miles. At Monteverde, La Selva, and Bosque del Rio Tigre the trails can be steep, muddy, and slippery in short sections; although we do not walk rapidly they can be difficult for those whose legs, knees, and feet are not in good shape and for those with balance problems. Our other lodges also have trails that may be steep in places but not muddy. Good foot wear is essential, walking sticks (with wrist straps) recommended. For the muddy trails, rubber boots are highly recommended and can be borrowed from the lodge if you have average-sized feet.

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One of our birding walks at Bosque involves wading across a shallow creek four or five times (quite delightful, actually), for which sturdy sandals such as Chacos or Tevas are ideal (not flip-flops), or one can borrow rubber boots from the lodge.

We often walk very slowly on roads and trails, spending some time standing and watching mixed flocks; some find portable collapsible stools a relief during periods when we are standing in one spot for more than a few minutes.

**HEALTH:** It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the regions you are visiting. Please contact your doctor well in advance of your tour's departure as some medication must be initiated weeks before the period of possible exposure.

It is recommended that you are up-to-date on routine vaccinations. These include measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine, varicella (chickenpox) vaccine, polio vaccine, and your yearly flu vaccination. It is further recommended that most travellers have protection against Hepatitis A and Typhoid.

There is little to no risk of malaria and there is no Yellow Fever in Costa Rica.

Biting insects are seldom a major nuisance although chiggers and ticks can be locally numerous. Many potential health problems can be prevented by adequate protection against insects. Even when mosquitoes may be sparse, biting gnats and chiggers can still be a nuisance. To be protected, bring plenty of spray repellent and wear long sleeves and trousers when in the field. Anyone who is unusually sensitive to insect bites and stings (ants, wasps) should consider bringing an antihistamine such as Benadryl.

While not carriers of disease, chiggers are perhaps the biggest nuisance in the New World tropics. Nearly invisible, and inhabiting grassy and weedy edges in warm, humid climates where other hosts such as livestock or wild animals are common, they bite unseen and unfelt, drop off after having their fill of epidermis in just a few hours, and then a day later leave a spot that itches intensely for about three days or more. The best prevention against chiggers (and also mosquitoes) is to treat your clothing with Permethrin one to a few days before you leave home. This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings. Most economical is a 10% concentrate which you dilute and then treat clothing by soaking it in a large bag and then hang out to dry.

Miscellaneous: We do not often encounter snakes and take time to observe them whenever possible; most are not venomous, and venomous ones are not aggressive; in any event, a small torch or headlamp (hands-free is the obvious benefit) is a necessity for navigating the paths between your rooms and dining areas at each lodge in the evenings. At times we will be remote, and while the lodges have emergency medical supplies, professional medical assistance will be several hours away from some of them.

One can never completely escape the risk of parasites or fungal infections. Drinking water is purified in San José hotels and restaurants and is potable at our high elevation lodges. Elsewhere and on our bus, filtered or bottled water is always available. Gastrointestinal problems are always a possibility while traveling; you may want to bring Imodium or some other reliable anti-diarrhoea medication. Finally, you may wish to bring a broad-spectrum antibiotic in case of stubborn bacterial infections.

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It may be difficult to obtain any special medication during the tour, so bring all you are likely to need.

For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website [www.masta-travel-health.com](http://www.masta-travel-health.com)

**ACCOMMODATION:** Our hotels and lodges are always comfortable, usually the best available. All but one of our lodges have private bathrooms with hot water and electricity. Bathrooms have tubs or showers or both. Bosque del Rio Tigre, where we stay three nights, has more the feel of a jungle lodge than a resort (including excellent birding right by the rooms): the private rooms have walls that are solid but open to the ceilings (and mosquito netting over the beds for peace of mind only – they are not really necessary), bathrooms are shared but close to the rooms, and showers (with hot water) are in a separate building right next to the main lodge.

The tap water is safe to drink in all but two of our hotels, where bottled water is available. As is typical in the tropics, occasionally, small lizards, amphibians or unusual insects may visit a hotel room, especially in the lower elevations.

**LAUNDRY SERVICE:** Most of our hotels offer laundry service, though it won't be possible at our hotels at Carara and near Arenal, where we spend just one night. Items hand-washed in the humid lowlands may take a very long time to dry, but it should be quite dry on the Pacific coast, and Bosque del Rio Tigre has a wash basin for clients' use.

**ELECTRICITY:** 110V/220V AC 60Hz with two flat parallel prongs. We recommend bringing a small torch or LED headlamp for use in dimly lit cabins at night. Bosque del Rio Tigre has limited electricity for charging batteries during daylight hours. An international travel plug is useful and can be bought in most airport departure lounges. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

**FOOD:** Food in Costa Rica is not known for being distinctive but it is consistently very good to excellent and not remotely spicy. Fresh fruit, green vegetables, and tasty main dishes are served at our hotel restaurants and are all safe to eat. A well-liked staple for breakfast is *gallo pinto*, a mix of rice and beans, though cereals, eggs and fresh fruit are also available. A popular lunch dish is the *casado*, with sides of beans, rice, plantain, and salad along with a meat or sometimes even vegetarian option. We'll eat at a variety of restaurant types, including cafeteria-style, buffet, and ordering from a menu. A departure from the normal is Bosque de Rio Tigre, where amazing meals are prepared in their tiny jungle kitchen and plated for us.

Sunbird tours are all-inclusive and no refunds can be issued for any tour meals participants choose to miss. While we will try to do all we can to accommodate the requirements of all participants, please note that we cannot guarantee all causes of food allergies can be avoided at every destination. Many restaurants offer set menus and are unable to accommodate all special requests within a group. Thus, participants with significant food allergies or special dietary needs should bring appropriate foods with them for those times when their needs can, regrettably, not be accommodated. Our tours are carefully scheduled to insure the best possible birding experience and although the leaders will do all they can to make sure the group eats at a reasonable time, sometimes early or late lunches and/or evening meals cannot be avoided. Any participants who need to eat at specific times may need to bring supplemental food with them.

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**DRINKS:** Water and a soft drink, a beer, or a glass of wine are provided at lunch and dinner, as is coffee or tea. Any extra drinks are the responsibility of the individual. All our lodges have excellent, potable tap water for refilling your own bottles (or at least a filtered water station), but we also keep bottled water on the bus for refilling during the day. As it can get hot and dry, we insist you bring a large, good quality water bottle and keep this topped up.

**INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS:** Wifi is available at all of our lodges, though only briefly and upon request with the solar-charged battery power of Bosque del Rio Tigre.

Mobile phones can be useful while on tour but keep in mind that many countries operate on a different cellular technology. Your phone may be incompatible with the local system, so please check with your local carrier. Fortunately, with the advent of smartphones, it is easy to download applications such as Skype or Google Voice, which can make calling home free or very inexpensive.

Another option is to replace the data ("SIM") card in your phone in-country. The SIM cards, including data can be very cheap. If you wish to use this option you will need to check that your smart phone has a SIM card slot.

**FIELD CLOTHING:** Dress is informal throughout. Comfortable field clothes and shoes are essential.

Sun hat	Sturdy footwear (lightweight, waterproof hiking shoes)
Lightweight sweater / fleece	Lightweight wool or wool-blend field socks
Shorts (for around the lodges)	T-shirts
Lightweight gloves	Warm cap
Light rain jacket / windbreaker	Long-sleeved cotton or fast-drying microfiber shirts
Light tennis shoes (for around the lodges and easy trails)	
Long trousers for the field, preferably light cotton or a breathable, quick-drying fabric	

Rubber boots: For the wetter trails and on birding walks when it rains, rubber boots are the best way to keep feet dry; back at the lodge one can change back into dry socks and shoes. Boots are available to borrow at Bosque del Rio Tigre, where they will be most useful, but those with large feet should consider bringing their own.

We recommend not wearing clothing in the field that reflects ultraviolet light, including bright white and fluorescent (or "neon") colours. Birds can see near-UV light, and since shy birds are sensitive to our movements, such bright colours will accentuate them, possibly meaning the difference between seeing a reclusive antpitta or tinamou and having it slink away unobserved. Normal reds, yellows, oranges, blues, and greens are fine.

**MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:** You should bring the following:

Notebook and pen	Alarm clock
Small rucksack/ day pack	Small, collapsible travel stool
Headlamp or torch with spare batteries	Compact umbrella
Sunscreen	Refillable water bottle
Shampoo	Insect repellent
Rubber flipflops for showers	Wash cloth (not provided by some hotels)
Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)	Cool-water laundry soap
Pocket knife (packed in checked-in bags)	Travel clothesline
Plastic bags (rain protection for optical equipment)	Hiking stick
Personal medication	

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**Optional:** Telescope & tripod (recommended if you have them), camera, film or memory cards, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide, swimwear.

**Note:** The most effective insect repellents are those containing at least 35% of the active ingredient diethyltoluamide (DEET). The higher the percentage, the greater the effectiveness. However, care must be taken to avoid getting the repellent on to optical equipment as it dissolves rubber and plastic and can damage coated lenses. A reasonably effective alternative, which isn't corrosive, is Mosi-guard, produced by MASTA, and we recommend this. It is available in most high street chemist (including those at the airport). New products containing tick- and chigger-repelling chemicals are particularly effective.

Camping supply stores sell such a product containing permethrin 0.5%, which must be applied directly to clothing in advance of wearing and allowed to dry. This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings. Please make sure you never to spray insect repellent inside the vehicle or when you are standing close to other participants – it may drift on to their optical equipment.

**LEADER'S EQUIPMENT:** The leader will provide the following:

Telescope	Basic first aid kit
Spotlight	Playback equipment
Field library & maps	Laser pointer

**LUGGAGE:** Our Final Information document, which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure, will give details about baggage weight and size restrictions imposed by the airline used for this tour.

If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these pack more easily into our vehicles during the tour. Please note that on many tours there are no porters to carry your luggage so please ensure that **no bag is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself**. As a general rule, in addition to using your luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Scenery and memory shots will be plentiful and simple to obtain but birds are difficult to photograph although there will be occasions when bird photography is possible (such as at hummingbird feeders). Digiscoping is perfectly compatible with the tour, though it is recommended that you bring your own telescope – the leader's telescope will not be available for this activity. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture-proof and dust-proof bags, as a precaution.

There will be plenty of opportunities to take photos of birds, mammals and scenery and the leaders will do all they can to accommodate anyone wishing to take photographs. However if you are a serious photographer please bear in mind that this is first and foremost a birdwatching tour. Please do not allow your photographic desires to conflict with other participants' birdwatching activities.

**TRANSPORT:** We will be traveling by comfortable, air-conditioned minibus for the whole tour. Some roads are quite bumpy, potholed, and/or winding; anyone susceptible to motion sickness should bring an appropriate remedy. Participants should be able to sit in any seat in our vehicles.

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**SMOKING:** Smoking is not allowed in the vehicles or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists etc. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please do not smoke in the room. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group if possible.

**TRAVEL INSURANCE:** Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. If you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please make sure they are also adequately insured on your home contents policy, as most travel insurance policies do not cover very expensive individual items. You may wish to consult your insurance broker regarding coverage. Please also ensure that your policy covers you in the event of a medical emergency, cancellation of a trip or severe delays. Medical costs abroad can often be extremely expensive.

Please note that Sunbird is not liable for any medical or repatriation costs resulting from injury or illness during a tour or for covering any costs resulting from a flight delay such as extra hotel accommodation.

If you wish, insurance can be arranged by Helen Fisher, Bullerwell Independent Insurance Brokers, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234-866964. Please contact Helen for a quote and she will send the schedule directly to you.

**TIPPING:** All tour-based tips are included in the tour price. These include tips to local guides, drivers, hotel porters, and waiters and waitresses. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

#### Birds

Garrigues, Richard and Robert Dean. 2014. *The Birds of Costa Rica, Second Edition*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY. **The essential, recommended field guide.**

Stiles, F. Gary, Alexander Skutch, and Dana Gardner. 1989. *A Guide to the Birds of Costa Rica*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY. Still useful for natural history information, **but not recommended as a field guide, as names and taxonomy are very out-of-date.**

#### General References and Natural History

Chacón, Federico Muñoz and Richard Dennis Johnston. 2013. *Amphibians and Reptiles of Costa Rica: A Pocket Guide*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.

Forsyth, Adrian and Ken Miyata. 1984. *Tropical Nature*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. A very good and worthwhile read if you never been to the Neotropics, but beware that the chapter on oropendola nesting is no longer valid.

Garwood, Kim and Richard Lehman. 2013. *Butterflies of Central America*. Available directly from the authors at <http://neotropicalbutterflies.com>.

Guyer, Craig and Maureen A. Donnelly. 2004. *Amphibians and Reptiles of La Selva, Costa Rica, and the Caribbean Slope: A Comprehensive Guide*. University of California Press, Oakland, CA.

Hilty, Steven. 1994. *Birds of Tropical America*. Chapters Publishing, Ltd., Shelburne, CT. Excellent treatment of natural history of Neotropical birds.

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Kricher, John C. 1999. *A Neotropical Companion*. Second edition. Princeton University Press. An introduction to the animals, plants and ecosystems of the Neotropics.

Wainright, Mark. 2007. *The Mammals of Costa Rica: A Natural History and Field Guide*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.

**OBTAINING BOOKS:** Most of the field guides and the major ornithological references in print are available by mail order from booksellers specialising in natural history titles.

Natural History Book Service Ltd  
Tel: 01803 865913  
[www.nhbs.co.uk](http://www.nhbs.co.uk)

Subbuteo Books  
Tel: 0870 010 9700  
[www.wildlifebooks.com](http://www.wildlifebooks.com)

WildSounds  
Tel: 01263 741100  
[www.wildsounds.co.uk](http://www.wildsounds.co.uk)

**NEOTROPICAL BIRD CLUB:** Please support this charity which aims to raise money to support conservation projects, encourages an interest in the conservation of birds, and liaises with and promotes the work of existing societies within the region. You will find their contact details and further information about the Club at [www.neotropicalbirdclub.org](http://www.neotropicalbirdclub.org)

**FINAL INFORMATION:** Final information with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses, etc, and your air tickets will be sent to you about three weeks before the start of the tour. Other news will be communicated as necessary. If you have any questions about any aspect of the tour, please contact us.