

## FODOR'S COSTA RICA 2012: GREAT ITINERARIES BEACHES, RAIN FORESTS, AND VOLCANOES

### **Day 1: Arrival**

Arrive in San José (most arrivals are in the evening) and head straight to one of the small luxury hotels north of the city in the Central Valley. A favorite of ours is Finca Rosa Blanca, a fairy-tale retreat overlooking miles of coffee farms.

**Logistics:** Brace yourself for long lines at immigration if you arrive in the evening along with all the other large flights from North America. Try to get a seat near the front of the plane, and don't dawdle when disembarking.

### **Day 2: Poás Volcano and Tabacón Hot Springs**

Volcán Poás, where you can peer over the edge of a crater, lies nearby. Fortify yourself with the fruits, jellies, and chocolates sold by vendors on the road up to the summit. A scenic drive takes you to La Fortuna area. Drop your luggage at one of many fantastic hotels (Montaña de Fuego is our pick for fabulous volcano views), and go directly to Tabacón Hot Springs & Resort. Take a zip-line or hanging-bridges tour through the forest canopy and then pamper yourself with a spa treatment. Finish the day by sinking into a volcanically heated mineral bath with a cocktail at your side as the sun sets behind fiery Volcán Arenal.

**Logistics:** Get an early start to get the best views of Poás. Shuttle vans can get you to Arenal and have hotel-to-hotel service.

### **Day 3: Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge**

Spend your entire day in the Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge, a lowland forest reserve replete with waterfowl near the Nicaraguan border.

**Logistics:** Book your trip the night before; tour operators in La Fortuna keep evening hours for exactly that reason. All transport will be included.

### **Day 4: Scenic Drive to the Central Pacific**

Today's a traveling day—a chance to really see the country's famous landscape and infamous roads. (Believe us, they get a lot worse than this route.) A few hours' drive from Arenal takes you to fabled Manuel Antonio on the Central Pacific coast. Beyond-beautiful hotels are the norm here, and you have your choice of seaside villas or tree-shrouded jungle lodges. We like the hillside La Mariposa, which has commanding views.

**Logistics:** Hotel-to-hotel shuttle-van services can get you to Manuel Antonio. If you drive instead, start out as early as possible. You'll pass through two mountainous stretches (between La Fortuna and San Ramón and between Atenas and the coast) that fog over by midafternoon.

### **Day 5: Manuel Antonio National Park**

Manuel Antonio is Costa Rica's most famous national park for a reason: it has beaches, lush rain forest, mangrove swamps, and rocky coves with abundant marine life. You can—and should—spend an entire day exploring the park, home to capuchin monkeys, sloths, agoutis, and 200 species of birds. It's also one of two locales in the country where you'll see squirrel monkeys.

**Logistics:** Almost all Manuel Antonio hotels have transport to the park. If yours doesn't, taxis are plentiful and cheap.

## **Day 6: Beach Yourself**

Days 1 through 5 were “on the go” days. Reward yourself today with lots of relaxation. Manuel Antonio means beaches, and there are several to choose from. Manuel Antonio and neighboring Quepos mean restaurants, too, the best selection of any beach community in the country.

**Logistics:** Most everything you need here is strung along the 5-km (3-mi) road between Quepos and Manuel Antonio National Park. It’s practically impossible to get lost.

## **Day 7: San José**

A morning drive back to San José gives you time to spend the afternoon in the city. We like the cozy, classy Hôtel Le Bergerac. Visit the Teatro Nacional, the capital’s must-see sight, and save time for late-afternoon shopping. An evening dinner caps off your trip before you turn in early to get ready for tomorrow morning’s departure.

**Logistics:** As the number of visitors to Costa Rica grows, so does the number of passengers using Aeropuerto Internacional Juan Santamaría. We recommend that you check in three hours before your flight. Better safe than sorry.