



## Costa Rica Sampler Trip Report (Feb 17 - 28, 2025)

[Link: Costa Rica Sampler Trip Report \(Feb 17 - 28, 2025\)](#)

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*Beautiful weather made for fantastic volcanic views and lots of birds! Resplendent Quetzal, Costa-Rican Pygmy-Owl, Sunbittern, American Pygmy-Kingfisher were just a few highlights from this trip. Besides the birds, we enjoyed good company, delicious food, and many amazing sights. An unforgettable trip sampling the very best of Costa Rica!*

### **Day 1 - Meeting & Hotel Bougainvillea Grounds**

We officially kicked off the tour by gathering at the Hotel Bougainvillea and exploring its beautiful gardens. The property is home to a diverse array of bird species, and we were fortunate to have great views of several, including Lesson's Motmot, Rufous-backed Wren, Bicolored Hawk, Masked Tityra, White-tailed Kite, and a roosting Mottled Owl. Following this excursion, we enjoyed a delightful dinner at the hotel restaurant before preparing for our departure and the first full day together in Costa Rica.

### **Day 2 - Caldera Mangroves & Tarcoles Area**

We started our day by driving from the Hotel Bougainvillea in the Central Valley along the Virilla River drainage, making our way to the Pacific coast to explore the Mata de Limón mangroves near Caldera. This remarkable site, where tropical dry forest meets mangrove habitat, offered us excellent birdwatching opportunities. We encountered a diverse array of species, including the White-lored Gnatcatcher, Prothonotary Warbler, Black-headed Trogon, Rufous-naped Wren, Streak-backed Oriole, Mangrove Cuckoo, Nutting's Flycatcher, Mangrove Hummingbird and Turquoise-browed Motmot.

### **Day 3 - Carara National Park**

Our second guide, a last-minute replacement for Benny, who broke his collarbone a few days before the trip, arrived at our hotel at 6:30 am by taxi after flight cancellations and delays. But, never one to miss out on anything, Kiirsti grabbed coffee and breakfast to go and joined us for a walk at Carara National Park. On the trails, we enjoyed our first real taste of Costa Rica's tropical rainforests. Carara offered us great looks of Gartered Trogon, Dot-winged Antwren, Rose-throated Becard, and Velvety Manakin. Besides birds, we also saw green-and-black poison dart frogs, gray sac-winged bats, and howler monkeys. In the afternoon, we walked the grounds of the hotel and found a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl being mobbed by a variety of songbirds.



*Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl* © Blair Dudeck



*Birding in Punta Leona © Kiirsti Owen*



*Velvety Manakin © Blair Dudeck*

## **Day 4 - Tárcoles River**

We started the day with a pre-breakfast walk down to the beach to catch the sunrise. We spent the rest of the day in Tárcoles. In the morning, we birded along the road. We pulled over quickly after spotting a juvenile tiger-heron in a small roadside mangrove, then noticed that there were, in fact,

five species of herons in this small area: Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Boat-billed Heron, Great Egret, Little Blue Heron, and Green Heron! We walked the road and had spectacular looks of a Laughing Falcon, and several Scarlet Macaws, including two perched at a heart-shaped nesting cavity. After lunch, we boarded a boat trip on the Tárcoles River and traveled on the water to view wetland birds.



*Beach birding © Kiirsti Owen*



*Scarlet Macaw © Blair Dudeck*



*Group photo on boat © Kiirsti Owen*

Everyone was almost overwhelmed with the number of birds we were seeing. Some highlights were Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, Franklin's Gull, Wilson's Plover, Whimbrel, White Ibis, several species of kingfisher, but the star of the show was certainly the American Pygmy Kingfisher! A hard bird to spot, and so our group was really excited when we found one hiding in the shade under a riverside bank. We were treated to a beautiful sunrise on our boat ride back.



*Roseate Spoonbill © Blair Dudeck*



*Tarcoles Sunset © Kiirsti Owen*

## **Day 5 - Río Loro Municipal Park**

After breakfast, we left the coast and traveled east to higher elevations. We had a picnic lunch at Río Loro park where we saw Long-tailed Manakins, Chestnut-capped Warbler, and Slate-throated Redstart. Then we continued on our journey and arrived in Cartago in the late afternoon. The hotel grounds offered beautiful views of the valley, and we watched White-crowned Parrots fly into nearby trees while we enjoyed some cold Imperial cervezas.

## **Day 6 - Ujarrás Valley and Café Cristina**

We did some pre-breakfast birding in the area the goal of finding the endemic Cabinis's Ground-Sparrow. Our fantastic driver, Rodrigo, had very keen eyes and knew all the best spots to stop, so he was able to find us this wonderful endemic bird. We also made stops to see both male and female Hook-billed Kites. We also checked out some nearby Spanish colonial ruins.



*Hook-billed Kite © Blair Dudeck*



*Our group at ruins © Blair Dudeck*

After breakfast, we went down to a reservoir to look for wetland birds and found Least Grebes. In the afternoon, we visited Finca Cristina, a local shade-grown coffee plantain owned by the parents of another Eagle-Eye Tours guide, Ernesto Carman. We learned about the values of shade-grown coffee, and how the coffee is grown and processed. We finished with samples of coffee and everyone bought as many bags of coffees as they could fit in their luggage.



*Finca Cristina © Kiirsti Owen*

## **Day 7 - Volcán Irazú**

We set out after breakfast and climbed up, up, up, to higher elevations. We stopped before the volcano to look for Resplendent Quetzals but were instead treated to a very cute and cooperative Costa Rican Pygmy-Owl. We also saw several hummingbirds that flew in to harass the owl. We had lunch at a wonderful little restaurant up the road that offered us great views of Slaty Flowerpiercer, Flame-colored Tanager, and Rufous-browed Peppershrike. We drove on to Volcán Irazú and saw Volcano Juncos immediately on disembarking the bus. We enjoyed watching Volcano and Fiery-throated Hummingbirds buzzing across the trail as we made our way down to the breathtaking views of Irazú. On our way back down, we decided to try again for the Resplendent Quetzal, and it was well worth the wait! We got not one, but FIVE quetzals, that flew in and treated us to some amazing looks and photo opportunities.



*Costa Rican Pygmy-Owl © Blair Dudeck*



*Resplendent Quetzal © Blair Dudeck*



*Flame-throated Warbler* © Blair Dudeck

## **Day 8 - La Selva Biological Station**

We hit the road extra early this morning and drove to La Selva Biological Station. Before getting out on the trails, we saw Golden-hooded Tanagers and Great Green Macaws. Along the trail, our local La Selva guide showed us a Crested Owl and both Three-toed and Two-toed Sloths!



*Sloth* © Kiirsti Owen



*Great Green Macaws © Blair Dudeck*

We had lunch at a place that was a little bit off the beaten path, but so worth the journey! This restaurant had incredible fruit feeders that allowed us to see many fantastic birds: Silver-throated Tanager, Scarlet-rumped Tanager, Northern Emerald Toucanet, Green-crowned Brilliant, Buff-fronted Quail-Dove and many others.



*Tanagers at fruit feeder © Kiirsti Owen*



*Red-headed Barbet* © Kiirsti Owen



*Buff-fronted Quail-Dove* © Blair Dudeck



*Prong-billed Barbet © Blair Dudeck*

After lunch, we continued on our journey towards Volcán Arenal. We drove up the long driveway to Arenal Lodge, our home for the next three days, and were blown away by the incredible views of the volcano from our accommodations.

## **Day 9 - Arenal Observatory Lodge**



*Sunrise at Arenal © Blair Dudeck*



*Pre-breakfast birding at Arenal © Blair Dudeck*

After breakfast, we visited the Arenal Observatory Lodge & Trails. We spent the morning walking the trails. We saw many Great Curassows, including the barred colour morph of the female that only occurs in this part of Costa Rica. A favourite bird of the walk was the Black-crested Coquette with his amazing head plumage. We had lunch at the observatory beside a large deck with great views of the volcano, surrounding area, and fruit feeders. When they refilled the fruit feeders, we watched as many birds came in for lunch: Great Curassow, Collared Aracari, Crested Guan, Gray-headed Chachalaca, Montezuma Oropendola, and several species of tanagers. We finished the day with another hike around Arenal Observatory Lodge & Trails, which included a hike down to a beautiful waterfall.





*Group watching birds at feeders* © Kiirsti Owen

## **Day 10 - Arenal Sky Adventures**

We spent the morning climbing up above the canopy at Sky Adventures to get a different perspective of the forests at the base of Volcán Arenal. We stopped at one viewpoint to watch two White Hawks soaring. After that hike, everyone was ready for a delicious meal at a local restaurant beside the lake. In the afternoon, we returned to our accommodations at Arenal Lodge and walked some of the trails on the hotel grounds. We saw a Northern Plain-Xenops, Scarlet-thighed Dacnis, Black-cowled Oriole, and many other birds along the trails.



*Black-cowled Oriole © Blair Dudeck*



*Birding at Arenal © Kiirsti Owen*

## **Day 11 - San Luis Canopy and Bajos La Paz**

Our last full day. After breakfast, we packed up and hit the road. We made a few stops on the way back to San José, including two fantastic fruit feeder locations that offered easy viewing and photo opportunities. At the feeders, we were able to see several species of tanagers, Black-cheeked

Woodpecker, White-eared Ground-sparrow, and Red-legged Honeycreepers. We arrived back in San José at our last hotel, where we shared one more meal and bird list together before saying goodbye.



*Blue-and-gold Tanager* © Blair Dudeck



*Emerald Tanager* © Kiirsti Owen



*Red-legged Honeycreepers* © Kiirsti Owen



*Our group in Irazu*

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