

Costa Rica Sampler Trip Report (Jan 18 - 29, 2025)

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Our recent Costa Rica sampler trip was a massive success! Weather, birds, hospitable Costa Rica "Ticos" - and some of the most amiable and delightful guests this guide has ever met - combined to make this trip a winner.



Scarlet Macaws © Blair Dudeck



Gareth helping a young Costa Rican get to know the birds!

The tour began at the Hotel Bougainvillea in San Jose, whose expansive grounds provided our first delightful birding surprises, from cacophonies of shrieking Orange-chinned Parakeets rocketing overhead to one of the hotel's longer term guests: the resident family of Mottled Owls, stoically regarding all passersby from perches in a stand of bamboo.



Hotel Bougainvillea grounds © Glen Parsneau

Our tour sampled many Costa Rican ecosystems, and halfway up nearby Irazu volcano we were privileged to get spectacular views of the largest member of the trogon family, reminding us that the

bird truly is a most Resplendent Quetzal.



Visiting Irazu volcano - and its unusual vegetation © Gareth Thomson



Resplendent Quetzal © Blair Dudeck

We met dozens of wonderful Costa Ricans, but bus driver Ramon Vargas was the runaway favorite of the group: he made driving the zany Costa Rican roads look effortless, even while alerting us to some amazing birds seen from the road, including Double-striped Thick-knee (described by our

Merlin app as a 'large and bizarre shorebird'). He used both ears and eyes to find us a veritable kaleidoscope of hawks: Gray Hawk, White Hawk, and Common Black Hawk. His good humor extended to everyone, and he would beam genially even as one of our guides, who spoke some Spanish, tortured his native language using some extremely flawed grammar...



Our driver, Ramon ©Cathy Carlson

The mountains were also home to our favorite lodging at Hotel Quelitales, which had everything an Eagle Eye group could ask for: birds everywhere in a wilderness setting, fresh air, great food, wonderful hosts, and hummingbird feeders giving dizzying views of Green Hermit, Violet Sabrewing, and Green Thorntail. Heck, the place even boasted its own Sunbittern, a focus species for several of our group.



Sunbittern © Blair Dudeck

Our peak experience came with our boat trip on the Tarcoles river. Skipper Juan Carlos and a superbly rich ecosystem kept our necks on a swivel for almost 3 hours in the magic light of late afternoon. The American Pygmy Kingfisher, who could comfortably fit into a teacup. Squadrons of Brown Pelicans and blizzards of Cattle Egrets, finding their evening roosts in the mangroves, joining a pensive-looking Boat-billed Heron. And a covey of half a dozen Prothonotary Warblers, illuminating the deep jungle shade like Christmas ornaments with their otherworldly golden glow.



Brown Pelicans roosting © Gareth Thomson

Brown Pelicans roosting. Gareth Thomson.



Our group © Gareth Thomson



Boat-billed Heron © Blair Dudeck

The hallmark of a trip is how it leaves you feeling at the end, and on our last day the guides were gratified to see the guest sink into a deeply mellow and tranquil mood. At Valle de Los Quetzales, our hosts Romaine and Ignacio found us all chairs at their outdoor feeder, and guests sat in a silent

semicircle in the setting sun, watching what our hosts jokingly referred to as Costa Rican TV: a of multicolored vibrant flurry of both resident and migrant birds. The guides made a couple of spirited attempts to get the group back on the bus, to no avail; we finally got the memo, found chairs, and settled in beside our new friends to watch the show...



Relaxing on trail © Gareth Thomson



Watching Costa Rican TV © Gareth Thomson



Tropical sunset during Tarcoles river boat trip © Blair Dudeck

[Costa Rica Sampler eBird list \(Jan 18 - 29, 2025\)](#)