



Costa Rica Sampler Trip Report (Jan 18 - 29, 2026)

[Link: Costa Rica Sampler Trip Report \(Jan 18 - 29, 2026\)](#)

Day 1. Hotel Bougainvillea

We gathered in the late afternoon for our first group birding in the spectacular gardens of Hotel Bougainvillea where we had a good sampling of some of the common yard birds of Costa Rica's Central Valley including Crimson-fronted Parakeet, Blue-and-white Swallow, Great Kiskadee, Social Flycatcher, Rufous-collared Sparrow, Clay-colored Thrush, Hoffman's Woodpecker and the resident Mottled Owls that roost in the large bamboo clump. After birding we had our briefing and dinner before going to bed to get prepared for our first full day of birding.

Day 2. Caldera Mangroves, Guácimo Road, Tárcoles Birding Hotel, Hotel Santa Lucía

To avoid traffic and heat we departed Bougainvillea bright and early after a quick cup of coffee and drove west to the Pacific coast with our first stop being the Caldera mangroves. After a satisfying picnic breakfast we began seeing new birds very quickly including Orange-chinned and Orange-fronted Parakeets, Black-headed Trogon, Turquoise-browed Motmot, Northern Scrub Flycatcher, White-throated Magpie Jay, Baltimore and Streak-backed Oriole, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Common and Ruddy Ground-Doves, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Nutting's Flycatcher, Gray Hawk, a migratory Red-tailed Hawk and fantastic scope views of a perched **Gray-headed Kite**. One of our main targets here though was the endangered and endemic Mangrove Hummingbird which finally appeared and gave us great views as it fed from the pink flowers of a Madero Negro (*Gliricidia sepium*).



Birding at Caldera © Ernesto Carman

As the temperature began to soar we boarded the air conditioned bus and went birding along the Guácimo Road where we saw Plain-capped Starthroat, Groove-billed Ani and Clay-colored Thrush, and a little further down the road we spotted another one of our targets for this road, the **Double-striped Thick-Knee**, standing in the shade of a small tree. We drove to Tárcoles Birding Hotel where we had lunch while we enjoyed the view of the Golfo de Nicoya and watched White-faced Capuchin Monkeys and White-nosed Coatis raid the bird feeder. We also enjoyed great views of several hummingbirds feeding from a vervaine hedge including Ruby-throated, Blue-vented and Cinnamon Hummingbirds and Blue-throated Goldentail. After lunch we drove to the small village of Tárcoles where we saw Rufous-naped Wren, Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Lineated Woodpecker and a family of Black-and-white Owls roosting in a mango tree along the roadside! From here we drove the short distance to our hotel where we settled in for the evening and enjoyed a fantastic dinner.



Double-striped Thick-Knee © Ernesto Carman

Day 3. Carara National Park, Hotel Santa Lucía

We gathered at sunrise in the gardens of the hotel, surrounded by the giant **Gallinazo** (*Schyzolobium parahyba*) trees which were in full bloom, covered in golden yellow flowers and full of hummingbirds and honeycreepers. Before breakfast we spotted a few of the more common species here such as Gray-capped, Social and Streaked Flycatchers. After breakfast we visited Carara National Park and birded the Quebrada Bonita Trail which took us through portions of mature tropical rainforest with gigantic trees towering above us. Here we saw **Yellow-throated Toucan**, Lesser Nighthawk, Rufous-and-white Wren, White Ibis, Ochre-crowned Greenlet, White-shouldered Tanager, Slaty Antwren, Black-hooded and Russet Antshrikes, Plain Xenops and Tawny-winged Woodcreeper, most of which were in one mixed species flock! We also saw a **Canopy Bush-Anole** (*Polychrus guttuosus*) on a post which is a true treat as this reptile rarely comes down from the canopy. After lunch we walked the trail at the hotel and saw Blue-throated Goldentail, Scarlet Macaw and a White-whiskered Puffbird. After dinner we did a short night walk and saw Red-eyed Leaf-Frog, Harlequin Frog, Savage's Slender-toed Frog, Yellow-headed Gecko and a Common Pauraque.



Yellow-throated Toucan © Ernesto Carman



Scarlet Macaw © Ernesto Carman



Watching Canopy Bush Anole (on post) © Ernesto Carman

Day 4. Carara National Park, Tárcoles River Boat Tour

After breakfast we visited a different trail in Carara National Park and had another fantastic morning of birding. We had great views of Black-hooded Antshrike, Gartered Trogon, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Blue-throated Goldentail, Wood Thrush and more **Scarlet Macaws**. We also encountered a mixed species flock with Slaty Antwren, Chestnut-backed Antbird, Northern Royal Flycatcher, Eye-ringed Flatbill and a stunning Red-capped Manakin. After lunch we drove to the Tárcoles River where we were going to embark on a boat tour for the rest of the afternoon. We met our captain, Juan Carlos, and began seeing new birds every time the boat moved! We had an amazing array of egrets and herons, **Roseate Spoonbills**, **Wood Stork**, Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, Muscovy Ducks, a pair of **Collared Plovers** with chicks, four species of Kingfisher (Ringed, **Amazon**, Green and American Pygmy), **Mangrove Yellow Warbler**, Mangrove Hummingbird, Scarlet Macaws, **Yellow-naped Parrots**, hundreds of **Magnificent Frigatebirds** and Brown Pelicans, Common Black Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Osprey and a group of gulls and terns including **Royal, Sandwich and Elegant Terns**. We returned to the lodge for dinner and got a good night's sleep.



Roseate Spoonbill © Ernesto Carman



Wood Stork © Ernesto Carman



Collared Plover adult © Ernesto Carman



Amazon Kingfisher © Ernesto Carman



Royal, Sandwich and Elegant Terns © Ernesto Carman



Yellow-naped Amazon © Ernesto Carman

Day 5. Santa Lucía, Cartago, Cafe Cristina, Hotel Quelitales

Before breakfast we walked the trails at Santa Lucía and had more views of some species we had already seen, but also had a few new species including Greenish Elaenia, Southern Beardless Tyrannulet and fantastic views of Black-faced Antthrush. After breakfast we packed the bus and

made our way east across the Central Valley and made a quick stop for the bathroom and conveniently spotted a Scintillant Hummingbird on the flowers in the parking lot of a supermarket. We also stopped in the town square of the town of Paraíso where we saw the resident **Tropical Screech-Owls** and learned about the local conservation efforts for the Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow as we marveled over the large sculpture of this species which stands tall as the county bird of Paraíso. Afterwards we reached Cafe Cristina, Ernesto's family's farm where his parents awaited us with a magnificent lunch before we learned all the ins and outs of producing coffee, specifically organic, shade-grown coffee and how doing it the right way can greatly benefit the environment. We also saw several new birds on the farm including Golden-hooded, Bay-headed and Silver-throated Tanagers. We made our way to Hotel Quelitales in time to do a little late afternoon birding and saw Sooty-faced Finch, Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch, Violet Sabrewing, Green-crowned Brilliant, Green Hermit and Green Thorntail.



Golden-hooded Tanager © Ernesto Carman

Day 6. La Esperanza, Cerro de la Muerte, Miriam's Restaurant

We departed early as we had a mission: today we were going to look for the Resplendent Quetzal! We climbed up into the Talamanca mountains to the village of La Esperanza where we were met by our local guide Jorge Serrano. We walked up a short trail through a farm where we were going to wait in front of a fruiting wild avocado tree while we had our packed breakfast with plentiful tropical fruits ourselves! After we finished eating Jorge told us to follow him a bit further up the trail and when we arrived we spotted our target, a pair of **Resplendent Quetzals** excavating a nesting cavity! We had phenomenal views of both male and female, but little did we know it would only get better as two more females and another male joined the party and engaged in aerial courtship displays right over our head, the green tail feathers of the male trailing behind like ribbons! After this amazing experience we drove even higher up the Talamanca Mountains, all the way up to Cerro de la Muerte at 3400 m.a.s.l. Where we saw another one of our targets, the **Volcano Junco** as well as Sooty-capped Chlorospingus and Slaty Flowerpiercer. We then visited the Savegre Valley where we had a delicious family style lunch at Miriam's Restaurant which also happens to have amazing birds visiting the feeders. Here we saw **Talamanca**, Volcano and Fiery-throated Hummingbirds,

Lesser Violetear, **White-throated Mountain-Gem**, Yellow-thighed Brushfinch, Large-footed Finch, Acorn Woodpecker, Mountain Thrush and **Flame-colored Tanager**. Satisfied with the amazing birds we had seen, we drove back to Quelitales in time to visit the feeders by the waterfall and saw the usual suspects, but also had **Green-fronted Lancebill**, Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush and one of the specialties of this lodge, the Scaled Antpitta!



Talamanca Hummingbird © Ernesto Carman



White-throated Mountain-Gem © Ernesto Carman



Flame-colored Tanager © Ernesto Carman

Day 7. Hotel Quelitales, Ujarrás, Río Macho and Orosi

Once again we departed the hotel early and drove 15 minutes to a rural corner of the Ujarrás Valley where it did not take long to find one of our two pre-breakfast targets, the endemic and threatened Cabanis's Ground-Sparrow. We also enjoyed spectacular views of large flocks of Crimson-fronted Parakeets flying in the bright morning sun. We drove another short distance to a chayote plantation where Paz and Ernesto study **Hook-billed Kites**, our second morning target and we were immediately successful at getting fantastic views of multiple individuals of this snail-eating raptor, as we learned a great deal about its natural history and the ongoing research.



Hook-billed Kite © Ernesto Carman

We returned for breakfast and had a blast watching the feeder where Montezuma Oropendola, Scarlet-rumped, Silver-throated and Summer Tanagers, **White-eared Ground-Sparrow**, White-naped Brush-Finch and Baltimore Orioles joined us for breakfast. After breakfast we drove back out the valley and had close-up views of a pair of **Bat Falcons** and Southern Lapwings, then ended up visiting the Ruinas de Ujarrás, the ruins of an old church from the seventeenth century and saw Green-breasted Mango, **Collared Aracari**, Black Phoebe and Golden-browed Chlorophonia.



Scarlet-rumped Tanager © Ernesto Carman



Birding Ruinas de Ujarrás © Ernesto Carman

After lunch and a siesta (though some spotted Sunbittern instead!) we drove to Río Macho Forest Reserve just outside the village of Orosi. We arrived at sundown and spotted a pair of Black Guans feasting on the leaves and flowers of a Morning Glory vine before disappearing into the forest. We walked along the road, surrounded by forest, hoping to find an owl, but instead we saw several sleeping birds with the help of a thermal camera, including Swainson's Thrush, Silver-throated Tanager and Broad-winged Hawk. We also spotted an Olingo, a new mammal for our trip. After this night walk we enjoyed an amazing pizza dinner at Il Giardino before heading back to the hotel. But we had one more stop to make, and that was to see the resident Barn Owls in Paraíso!



Collared Aracari © Ernesto Carman

Day 8. Hotel Quelitales, La Hoja Garden, Arenal Observatory Lodge

We had a slightly later rise this morning to compensate the later evening and after breakfast we began our drive east following the Reventazón River to Siquirres, which is a beautiful scenic route through rural Costa Rica. We stopped at La Hoja Garden near Guápiles for lunch and to watch the incredible bird feeders which were literally hopping with birds! All **three species of Honeycreepers, Chestnut-headed** and Montezuma Oropendolas, Black-cowled and Baltimore Oriole, **Orange-chinned Parakeets**, Black-cheeked Woodpecker, **Collared Aracari** and even Yellow-throated Toucans came in to feed from the plantains. To top it all off we also saw a momma Three-toed Sloth with her baby in a tree just above the parking lot!



Shinning Honeycreeper © Ernesto Carman

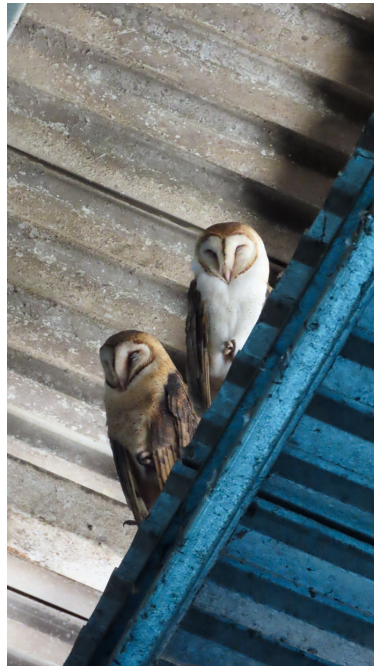


Orange-chinned Parakeets © Ernesto Carman



Birding Arenal Observatory Lodge © Ernesto Carman

Bellies and memory cards full, we continued heading west towards Arenal Observatory Lodge, but we made one pit stop along the way in Muelle where, not only were there bathrooms, there was also a pair of **Barn Owls** roosting in the rafters inside the supermarket! As we neared the lodge, the impressive Arenal Volcano welcomed us, almost completely clear of clouds and our expectations grew for the following day.



Barn Owl © Ernesto Carman

Day 9. Arenal Observatory Lodge

We gathered at 6:00 a.m. at the main deck in front of the restaurant which faces the impressive Arenal Volcano and has a bird feeder at eye level, and the birds were already lining-up and showing their pecking order with Great Curasows, Crested Guans and **Montezuma Oropendolas** feeding first, then all the smaller species came in including dozens of **Red-legged** and Green Honeycreepers, Yellow-throated Euphonias, Golden-hooded, Emerald, Silver-throated and Hepatic Tanagers. We also saw **Yellow-throated Toucans**, Rufous-winged Tanager, Bananaquit, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Red-lored Amazon and White-crowned Parrot. After breakfast we birded the gardens and one the shorter trails behind the lodge and had nonstop birds! We started out with point-blank views of two male **Black-crested Coquettes** feeding a few meters from where we were standing. We also encountered a mixed species flock in the forest where we saw White-throated Shrike-Tanager, Rufous Mourner, Spotted Woodcreeper and Sulphur-rumped Flycatcher, as White-collared Manakins displayed, snapping loudly in the background. Fortunately for us there were several fruiting fig trees in the garden which provided incessant views and photo opportunities of tanagers and toucans.



Red-legged Honeycreeper © Ernesto Carman



Black-crested Coquette © Ernesto Carman

Day 10. Arenal Observatory Lodge, Peninsula Road

Today was our first rainy day of the entire tour, but this did not deter us from birding! We drove downhill to the peninsula road which traverses part of Arenal National Park and fortunately we had a window when the rain let up and we were able to find an amazing number of birds including Spotted Woodcreeper, Russet Antshrike, Cinnamon Becard, Crimson-collared Tanager, **Broad-billed Motmot**, Plain Xenops, Red-throated Ant-tanager, Long-tailed Tyrant, Cinnamon-bellied Saltator, Black-cowled Oriole and a stunning Golden-winged Warbler. The rain continued sporadically for the rest of the day which we used wisely for some down time after lunch. After dinner we went for a night walk and the humid conditions were perfect to find **Red-eyed Leaf-Frogs!**



Broad-billed Motmot © Ernesto Carman

Day 11. La Selva Biological Station, Cinchona and Hotel Robledal

We departed early to make our way east to La Selva Biological Station where we spent the morning birding the rich lowland tropical rainforest. Here we were met by a resident guide, Kenneth Alfaro, who explained to us how La Selva and the Organization for Tropical Studies operates and all the research they do at the site. We were immediately greeted by a pair of the critically endangered **Great Green Macaws** feeding in a large tree above us and we also had great views of several birds in the blue sky including Gray-rumped Swift, Lesser Swallow-tailed Swift, **Gray-headed Kite** and Double-toothed Kite. We also saw **Graceful Black-throated Trogon**, Olive-throated Parakeets, Short-billed Pigeon, Black-crowned Antshrike and the secretive Great Tinamou preening calmly on the ground. We had great luck with reptiles and mammals as well, with great views of **Speckled Racer**, Southern Parrot Snake, a **golden Eyelash Pitviper**, **Strawberry Poison Frog**, Central American Spider Monkeys and **Collared Peccaries**! After a fantastic visit to La Selva we drove to Mirador Cinchona for lunch and we also saw **Prong-billed** and Red-headed Barbets coming to the feeders. We reached Hotel Robledal mid afternoon, checked in and had time for some late afternoon birding and saw Rufous-backed Wren, Spot-breasted Oriole, Barn Swallow, Lineated Woodpecker, Summer Tanager and Inca Dove before meeting for our farewell dinner and we reminisced over our favorite memories of our trip. Hasta pronto!



Golden Eyelash Pitviper © Ernesto Carman



Collared Peccary © Ernesto Carman