



Blue-throated Toucanet

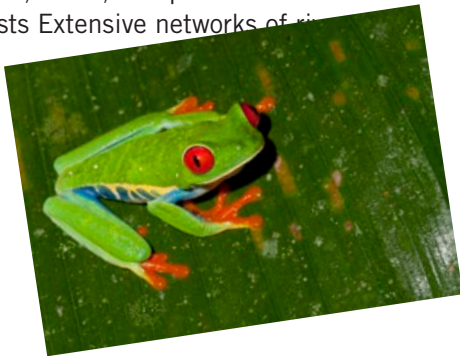
Costa Rica
Photo Expeditions 2026

Welcome to all our participants of this Costa Rica Expedition 2023

On this publication you'll find some interesting information about what you will encounter in Costa Rica. There's a lot of information on photographic techniques as well as tips and recommendations to ensure you maximize your experience in Costa Rica.

Here are few facts about Costa Rica you may want to know:

130 species of freshwater fish
160 species of amphibians
208 species of mammals
220 species of reptiles
850 species of birds
1,000 species of butterflies
1,200 varieties of orchids
9,000 species of plants
34,000 species of insects
Canal networks through jungles
Cloud forests
Coral reefs
Deciduous forests
Mangrove swamps
Rain forests
Tropical dry forests
Volcanoes (112 craters)
White, black, and pink shell beaches on both coasts
Extensive networks of rivers



Population
4,016,173

Land Area
19,540 Sq. Miles

Highest Point
12,529

10.7% Protected Land

17% Add. Buffer Zones

32 National Parks

13 Forest Preserves

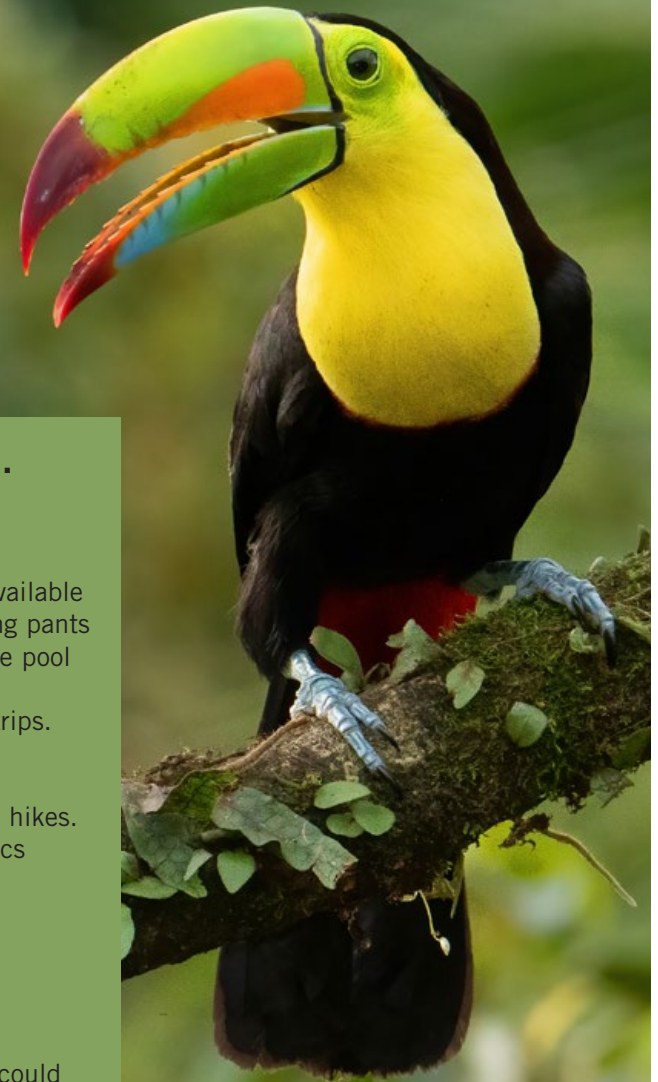
8 Biological Reserves

51 Wildlife Refuges

Things you need to bring with you.

- Passport/License (Very Important)
- Misc. spending cash (tips, gifts etc)
- Clothing for 7 days (Laundry services are available in most lodges for a fee). Bring jeans or long pants that could be re-used. Swimsuit!!! There are pool and beach opportunities.
- Washcloths or small towels to take on day trips.
- Hiking Shoes or boots.
- Rain poncho or jacket (It rains often)
- Headlamp (preferred) or flashlight for night hikes.
- Chargers and batteries for all your electronics devices.
- Any prescribed medications.
- Basic first aid items (aspirin, band-aids)
- Bird Guide
- Binoculars (optional)
- Camera instruction booklets.
- Your phone, may or may not work, but you could use Skype to make international calls.

If you have any questions please send me an email at rmung@wildstockphotos.com



Keel-billed Toucan

What's in my Camera Bag?

As a nature photographer I often carry more than I need in my backpack. Yet, the only negative is I may get tired after a long hike. The extra gear has its own advantages. Nothing worse than carrying only your big lens to find something worth shooting with your macro, or having to pass on a beautiful vista, just because you left the wide-angle lens behind. But occasionally I may choose to carry the minimum required if the conditions are too difficult and in order to ensure a safe come back for me and the gear. How much is too much is up to every photographer, but remember unless you bring your own sherpa or llama, you're on your own.

I personally prefer backpack-styled camera bags over the shoulder-style camera bag. There are multiple reasons for this choice. First, they tend to have an open floorplan: all your lenses can be accessed by simply opening the main section. Second, all the weight is distributed equally between your shoulders and in many cases a waist strap or belt is provided that allows all of the weight to rest on your waist rather than on your shoulders. The following image shows my favorite backpack, the Tamrac Expedition 8 with the usual equipment I carry.

The Break-down

1. 18-55mm Nikon
2. 8-16mm Sigma Extreme Wide-angle
3. 105mm Sigma Macro
4. Sony A6300
5. Nikon D500
6. D610 Backup Camera Body
7. Sigma 150-600mm
8. Nikon 910 Flasgh
9. Yongnou YN-685EX
10. Wireless Flash Rx/Tx
11. Macro bracket
12. Lens cleaning cloths and other accessories
13. Better Beamer (Flash Extender)
14. Batteries (Flash & Cameras)
15. Memory cards (Plenty)

Obviously, there's more to it. Battery chargers and few other items are stored in the outside pocket and the tripod goes in the suitcase.

I do travel with another carry-on, and that's my laptop. Camera gear and laptop always travel with me in the main cabin for obvious reasons. While this backpack may look excessive for a stroll along the trails of a local preserve, it is your lifeline as a photographer traveling abroad.

At least the weight limitations on travels through Central America are pretty flexible. Other destinations including countries in Africa and the Galapagos are more extrict as to how much you can bring.



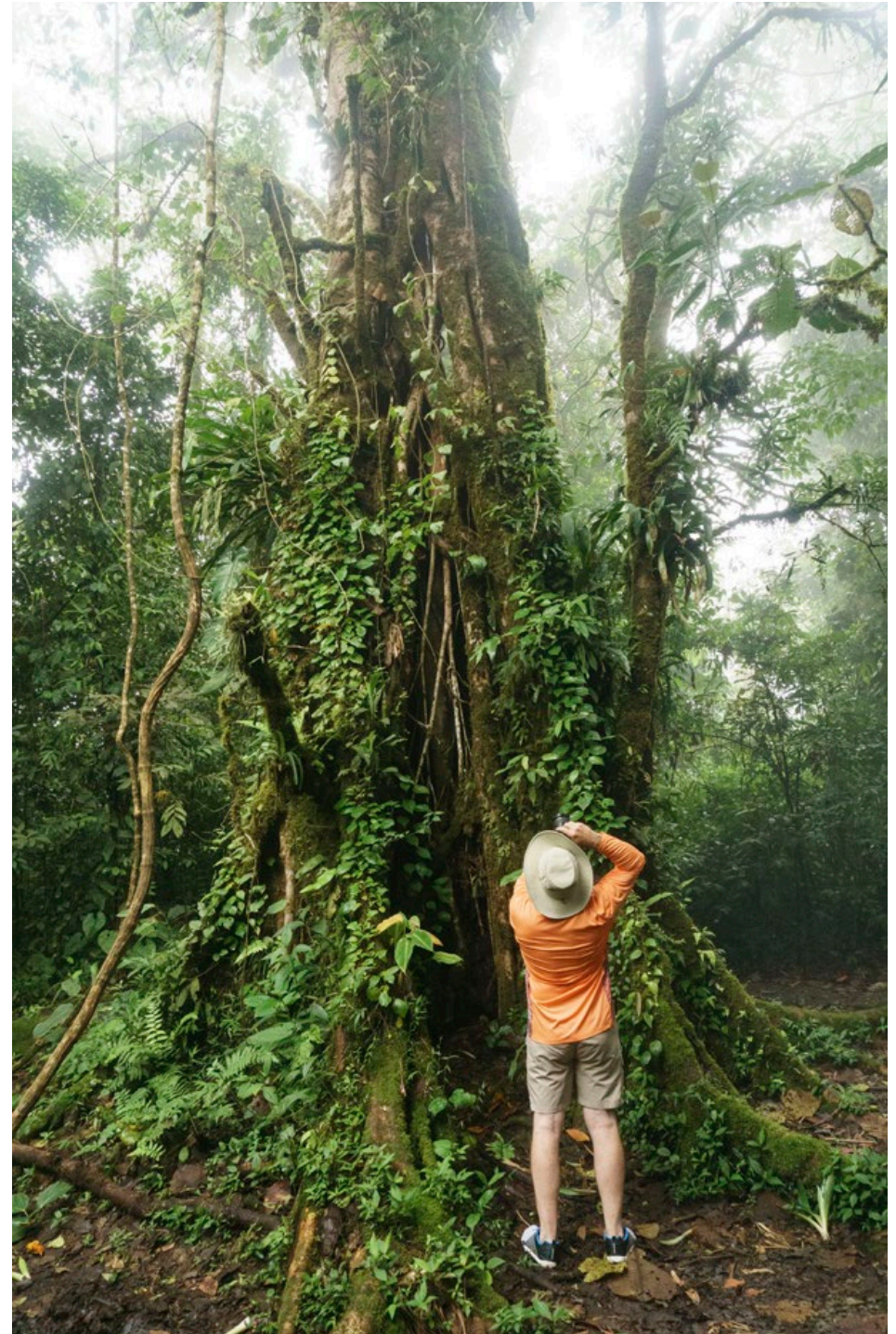
Shooting in the rainforest

Text & Photos ©R. Munguia

Shooting in a rainforest brings a series of challenges for the novice in this field. Having worked for many years inside El Yunque National Forest in Puerto Rico, my trip to Costa Rica came with no surprises. But for those of you meeting the rainforest for the first time, you're in for the wet ride of your life. There's no weather forecast in the rainforest. What the weather man says in the morning news does not apply to the macro climate of the wet forest. The humidity combined with the high temperatures of the summer months can lead to a lot of thunderstorms and fogged lenses. The most interesting part is that, opposite to Florida where it normally rains every afternoon during the summer months, in the rainforest it can rain at anytime and without warning.

For the reasons discussed above, it's recommended that you wear clothes that can get dirty and wet, and carry a raincoat in an accessible pocket of your backpack in case it takes you by surprise. I have found that buying a larger size raincoat, usually allows to put it over your backpack. All photographic equipment must be carried in a backpack style camera case to free your hands in case you slip. The forest floor is covered with decaying leaves, but with the constant foot traffic on some trails, the ground turns muddy and slippery, making it hard and dangerous. High hiking boots are almost obligatory, not only for the protection when walking over roots and side vegetation, but in case of an animal bite. Costa Rica is well known for the venomous snakes, and while encounters with one during daylight are rare, at night things change dramatically. Many snakes are nocturnal as the mice they eat are active at night, meaning chances of coming too close to one by mistake are higher. It's also a good idea to bring few Ziplock bags large enough to fit your camera body and lenses, in case the rain turns into torrential downpours. A trash bag may be used to cover your whole camera bag.

One other element to fight inside any rainforest is the lack of light. While vegetation on the ground is low and scarce, the top of the trees are dense and block up to 80% of the light. This can be a real challenge at the best of times, imagine what happens when rain clouds cover the sky. Well, you are going to use the flash more often than not. Even on the open areas of a forest, you might need to use some fill flash to improve shadow details around your subject. Expect slow shutter speeds when shooting under the canopy. In order to balance the flash with the ambient exposure, be ready to use a tripod. A tripod is your most valuable piece of equipment in low light situations. Using wide open





Nothing better to represent the tropical rainforest than a Three-toed Sloth covered in algae.

apertures will guarantee faster shutter speeds while softening some unwanted background. A flash with built-in zoom head will work great for far away subjects. To project the light even farther, the use of a Better-Beamer or Project-A-Flash will greatly improve your flash range while saving battery power. By focusing the flash light, the light can travel a longer distance while saving battery life. This is really important while working away from any power source. Make a habit of bringing spare batteries, and a car charger for charging while on the road. Make sure you switch your

flash off when not in use. The capacitors will continue to draw energy from the batteries even when they sit idling.

There's plenty of opportunities for the macro photographer in the rainforest, meaning an off-camera flash will be extremely handy. Any macro lens from 50mm to 180mm will work just fine for 1:1 and 1:2 magnification power. Many of the macro subjects found in the forest tend to be slow as they don't get as much radiation from the sun, so posing them is not that hard. Beware from picking up caterpillars, especially those with spiny looks, they tend to be poisonous. When walking through the trails, learn and train yourself to see with your peripheral vision. Many subjects will try to hide from you as you approach them, and many jump out of sight as you pass them. Your eyes can see objects and sense motion even when you don't have a direct contact with the subject. Scan slowly but don't take your eyes from the trail for prolonged times, occasionally tiny reptiles and amphibians may stop on the trails to get warm.

Colors are hidden in the deepest areas of the forest in the form of orchids and glowing fungi. We even have bioluminescent mushrooms that can only be seen at night. There are so many hidden organisms, that you must carefully look in order to find them. Many people that visit the rainforest for the first time come back a little frustrated, and usually complaining about not seeing as many things as they expected. Well, reality is that many of them didn't know where to look for, and since their brain database didn't have any entries for the new organisms in front of their eyes, they probably missed a lot. Do a good research about the living creatures you're about to encounter, that way you have a mental picture of what to look for. Now you're ready to explore in search of those creatures, keep in mind you're invading their space and they can retaliate. Respect them, and make sure to leave them as you found them, and never block their path. Stress can kill animals. Try to spend the least time possible to get your shot. For sure you won't run out of subjects to shoot if you choose Costa Rica as your shooting destination.



There are plenty of opportunities to document life in the rainforest with a macro lens. Too many photographers put all their effort on the birds and the mammals usually ignoring all the other subjects needed to tell a story.

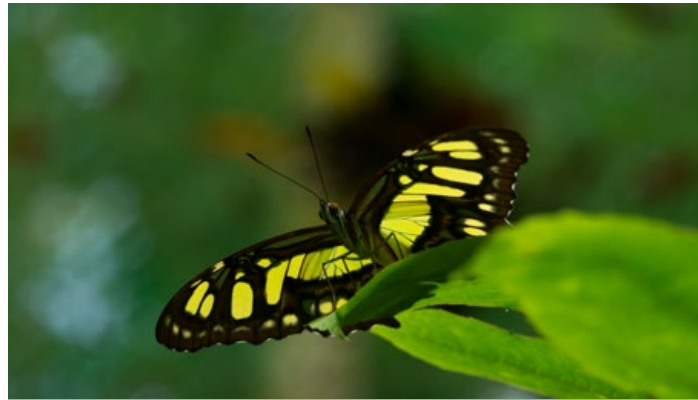
To Flash or Not to Flash

Flash photography is not for everybody. Some people love it and master it, other just claim it is fake and detrimental for wildlife. Having worked with wildlife for most of my life, and doing photography for nearly 30 years, I can assure flash has little effect on wildlife due to its short duration. As a creative tool, the flash can transform a rather boring shot into something with a punch. The most common use of flash in photography is as a fill-flash where the accessory light is used to lighten up the shadows, but there are other uses. Main or primary flash is when the image is completely created by a flash and little available light is used in the shot. This technique is very common when working macro and when shooting wing-stopping images of hummingbirds. For hummingbirds I use from 3-5 flashes set to minimal power setting sometimes between 1/32 and 1/64. This in turn reduces the flash duration to 1/10,000 and even down to 1/25,000. This slow flash duration is what allows freezing the action.

When shooting amphibians, I prefer to shoot them while they are active which for most species is at night. This will require flash as a main light source. While prolonged exposure to flash should be avoided, there's no evidence that flash will or not hurt the subject's eyes. Additionally, any animal exposed to sunlight receives more radiation to their retinas on a daily basis, thus the effect of flash if any, is minimal and temporary. On another note, you may have seen a lot of photos of beautiful red-eye treefrogs taken in daylight. These pictures besides from being scientifically incorrect, they're unethical from the standpoint that the animal was disturbed from its resting state to take the picture, which is a waste of energy and risks dessication. As a general rule the following considerations should be taken if flash is to be used:

- If the animal reacts to the flash in a negative way, then its use should be discontinued.
- Nocturnal animals may be put at risk due to temporary blindness (Ex. Owls) that may hinder their ability to avoid obstacles or catch prey.
- At night, the number of flashes on a subject should be reduced to a minimum or enough time in between to allow for the rods to recharge.

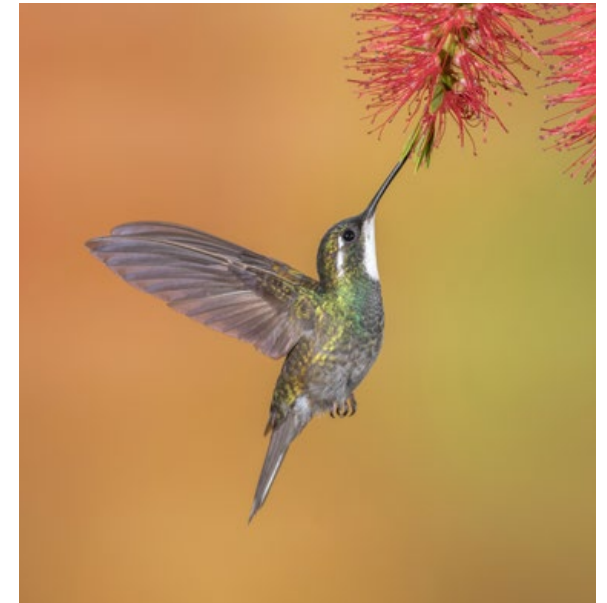
In conclusion, diurnal animals do not suffer from the use of flash as they are exposed to higher levels and duration of light provided by the sun. For nocturnal wildlife there's definitely some things to consider, but rest assured the flash would not damage their eyes as some people claim.



This Malachite butterfly was shot without flash using only natural light highlighting the translucency of wings.



The same was shot using a fill-flash. Notice the colors of the underside of the wings not seem in the ambient light photo.



To stop the wings of a hummingbird you'll need 1/20,000 sec. shutter speed. While that can't be achieved at the camera level, we can use the fast duration of the flash to stop the action. Most flashes at 1/32 or 1/64 power setting produce a flash of light with a 1/25,000 duration, enough to light your subject during the mechanical exposure of 1/250 of the camera.



Having Fun in Costa Rica: FOOD!

By Nyleen Rodriguez

When traveling to other countries, food can be a scary thing to think of and, at the same time, something that sparks your curiosity about what things will you be trying next. When traveling to Costa Rica, food is definitely something to try. Costa Rica is a country that produces a lot of the food that you are served in restaurants, so it is fresh, and you can tell. After traveling three times to Costa Rica, I have definitely enjoyed the flavors of the country and food is one of the things that every year entices me to come back.

A typical Costarican breakfast is not what anyone is used to in the States. Gallo pinto is rice mixed with either black or red beans. This is a very important part of the breakfast, but not the only part. Fresh fruits are always served first, including papaya, pineapples, bananas and other seasonal / regional fruits. Then comes the rice and the eggs, with some type of meat (ham, sausage or bacon), and toast. A slice of cheese processed in the area is usually present. Natural juices and coffee are also part of a complete breakfast. A lot of tourists say that they cannot handle this big breakfast, but after a few days, they realized is just another important part of the trip. Lunch consists typically of a dish call casado or another call gallo. A “casado”

is like a combination meal for us. It includes rice and beans, salad, vegetables, a boiled egg, and a meat, fish or chicken. To drink, you can always have a natural juice or water, or you might want to try a Fresca, a grapefruit soda produced by Coca-Cola. A gallo is usually a smaller portion of the casado that includes the meat but no rice and beans. Costa Rica is famous for its ice cream. Some of the best brands include the Monteverde ice cream, produced up in the cloud forest, and Dos Pinos, which is more common. Both are to die for, extremely creamy, and the best snack or dessert you can get.

One would think that after all that food, dinner would be light. Well, dinner is up to you. There are so many possibilities that you can definitely go for light or another casado. Why not? In Costa Rica, there are fast foods, but thanks to distance, they are not spread everywhere so you won't feel the need for a burger. Fruit stands are very common and stopping to try some is a rule to follow.

Anyway, when traveling abroad, explore, try and don't be shy. Costa Rica is a culinary paradise. Make sure to enjoy it.

Few Rules For This Adventure

Costa Rica is a country full of surprises, good ones for the most part. Unfortunately, there are few things that I want to make sure everybody on this trip understand to ensure our safe return. In the end, we are a small group with a bunch of eye-catching toys. In over 12 years of operations in Costa Rica we have never been victims of any crime, and we want to keep it that way. One of our toys can be the annual income for one Tico (Costa Ricans). I have compiled a list of things we should have in mind while wandering around to cover both protection from humans and non-human creatures, and for the total enjoyment of our time there.

Costa Rica Survival Rules

1. While we avoid large cities such as San Jose, is always a good practice to secure your money in a safe backpack or in your pockets. Do not flash your equipment either while in town. Only leave equipment in the vehicle if within sight or somebody stays near.
2. I enjoy night walks through the forest. Nobody goes out at night on open shoes. For your safety at all times, don't wear open shoes or sandals. Don't go out without headlamp or flashlight. Carry spare batteries with you.
3. Don't fool around with any snakes or insects, especially if you don't know them. In many cases, people don't make it to the hospital in time. Beautiful snakes are usually deadly, but ugly ones can harm you too. Few species we may encounter include: Eye-lash viper, Fer-de-lance, and Bushmaster. Costa Rica has one of the best anti-venom reserves in the world. In fact they produce it for many countries. In most cases local snake anti-venom is available at local hospitals.
4. Costa's weather can be a challenge, and rain comes and goes without warning. Have your raincoat in the backpack. It's cold at high altitude without rain, imaging with a downpour.
5. Be careful where you step. Your first step might feel secured but the second could send you down into the hole. The forest floor is usually wet and slippery.
6. Carry enough water and snacks for a half day trip. Granola or energy bars

work great, as long as you have something to gulp them down-water. Do not carry more than you need, always travel as light as possible. The heat and the humidity can take a toll on even the most inexperienced hiker.

7. Food is great in Costa. No McDonald's or BK's in every corner, meaning you'll eat a lot of typical Tican food. Rice and beans are in the menu for breakfast. Not a bad choice if you have a long day of hiking ahead. Stops while on the road for chicken and rice, and local fruits are common when traveling with me. I love guavas, rambutans & "mamon".
8. If ever approached by the locals, be courteous and polite. If in doubts on how to proceed, call me! Costa Ricans are among the friendliest people I've ever met. Talking to them can lead to great photographic opportunities, they know the whereabouts of the wildlife.
9. Be kind to others when taking pictures. Give a chance for everybody to get their shot. Share your findings and ask whenever in doubt about anything.
10. Feel free to engage with the locals, Ticos are really friendly and caring people and understand the importance of tourism for their country. On average they will go the distance to ensure you're happy at all times. Many speak English, but if you know a bit of Spanish...maybe that's the way to break the ice.

Bottomline, we'll have a lot of fun and stay safe throughout the whole trip. Just keep an eye for the pesky bullet ants.



We stop frequently as we drive the rural roads in Costa Rica. Wildlife can be found anywhere.

Costa Rica: The Challenges Of A Photo Safari

A trip to Costa Rica is no different than one to Africa. The wildlife and the people of this Central American country are fascinating. Though, this is 15th year leading tours in Costa Rica, it never ceases to amaze me. The more you explore the more you feel the urge to continue exploring. In every trip, I take a different approach as to where to go and how to get there. Many factors are considered including the weather, wildlife availability and road conditions. During the summer months, rains are expected almost every day in the afternoon, just like Florida weather. These rainstorms are essential to the survival of the rainforest on the pacific slopes and all the animals that thrive there. The humidity and temperature can be high and extenuating. As photographers we must learn to deal with these conditions in order to succeed in our search for the ultimate image.

Traveling through Costa Rica can be as challenging as the photography in the rainforest. Many roads lack names or signs, so navigating through rural areas can be an adventure by itself that can lead to new discoveries. Besides most country roads are in bad shape and in many cases they're simple dirt roads. But, traveling through these roads can yield unlimited opportunities for the nature photographer. The first time I visited, I was in search of the scarlet macaws. I was told where to find them and was decided to find them. Well, I hit the first site and there were no macaws at all. Following the lead of some locals I took a dirt road towards the mangroves at the mouth of Rio Tárcoles. Amazingly all the macaws were there, eating from a native almond tree. On my 2005 trip we were able to see them fly over Carara National Park, and then later over the Tárcoles beach. Carara is one of the least visited national parks, but one with hidden treasures. Knowing where to look for your subjects will really improve your chances on finding some of the most elusive animals. On this trip I'll be looking for some interesting species that can be hard to find such as the Potoo and some more common such as the Eye-lash Viper, one of the most dangerous snakes in the world. The one thing I like the most

about Costa Rica is its biodiversity. With over 800 species of birds, 160 of amphibians, 220 reptiles and 200 of mammals, you'll have many opportunities to get great wildlife pics. In the Tarcoles area we'll be treated to some amazing American crocodiles, and the beautiful poisonous frogs.



The Scarlet Macaw is very impressive bird that can be found in the Pacific lowlands. This one is eating the fruit of the Teak tree.

The weather and its effect on road conditions, will be one of the many challenges we'll face during our trip. The mountain weather of Monteverde and Savegre, are totally unpredictable, meaning we need to be prepared for rain and temperature drops at any time. On our last trip, we got drenched while walking one of the trails in Monteverde. A massive pacific fueled thunderstorm turned the trails into waterfalls, and the lightning was scary. Day by day, Costa Rica offers more excitement and photo opportunities than any other place I have visited so far.

Nothing better to define a rain forest than the Carara National Park or Braulio Carrillo. But rainforest are not the only type of forest we'll encounter in Costa Rica. On the mountain between 3,000-8,000 feet you may experience the Cloud Forest, a moist forest in which trees are covered with moss and airplants. My favorite Cloud Forest is located in Savegre, San

Gerardo de Dota. This type of forest is home to many highland species of birds including the Resplendent Quetzal. A few hours inside one of these forests and soon you'll be filling your 32GB card. While most people are attracted by the extensive avian fauna, these ecosystems provide endless opportunities for the well-rounded nature photographer.

While walking any of these types of forests, you can't miss the many amazing insects that thrive there. Looking closely under leaves, you might find roosting butterflies, huge caterpillars or rainbow colored grasshoppers. Every step you take on these trails can lead to new photo opportunities. It can get to the point where your brain is overloaded, and you can't barely focus anymore. The misty

mornings are truly an experience for the landscape photographer, as the light filters through the trees. Scanning the canopy, you might glimpse at a Bellbird or a Slaty trogon getting ready for the day ahead. No trip to Monteverde is completed without a stop at the Hummingbird Gallery, that more than just a photo gallery, it's a live hummingbird galore. Feeders are all over the place bringing over 10 species of hummers within an hour. They fly left and right, buzzing your ears without fear. The town of Santa Elena at the entrance to Monteverde hosts a series of interesting places. One such place is the Monteverde Frog Pond, a little but interesting site to see many of the native frogs of Costa Rica, including the arrow poison frogs and the red-eyed tree frogs. Also in Santa Elena, you can pay a visit to the Monteverde Butterfly Garden, definitely better than chasing butterflies in the wild. Here you'll have your picks from Blue Morphos, Clearwings, Heliconias and Malachites surrounded by magnificent vegetation including local vines and extravagant birds of paradise.

But the best of Costa Rica is yet to be found off the beaten paths of places such as the Curú private preserve, where time stands still and nature continues in front of your eyes. There was my first encounter with Scarlet macaws in the wild, and they still flash in my eyes three years later. No better way to enjoy these birds than flying low over the ground and better yet, when they stop in a nearby branch to play and preen for an hour, within feet of your lens. Hopefully, I'll get to see them again this year. They announce their beauty with loud squawks every morning and late afternoon over the Tárcoles river, near Carara National Park, a great place for birds and amphibians. When I first walked into this park, I was received by an army of Leaf-cutter ants, carrying large amount of green leaves they were picking from a nearby tree. Just the sight of the walking leaves against the morning light made this an unforgettable experience. But I made it there following directions from a herpetologist as to were to find the Black and Green Dart Frogs. Amazingly, he nailed down the directions to the inches. "Follow the trail until you get to the large tree, make a right and count 50 feet, to your right a tree with a large opening, look inside and you'll find a pair". Those were his words and that's exactly what I did. Within minutes, I found myself observing these beautiful gems of the amphibian world. The most



Considered one of the most beautiful birds in the world, the Resplendent Quetzal is one bird on our list.

amazing part is that my friend the herpetologist lives more than 100 miles away from this place, and his last visit to the site was more than a couple months before.

One of the many indescribable experiences in Costa Rica is the sound of Howler monkeys every morning. It can go from scary to comical, when several males give up their locations with the crack of dawn, alerting all the troop members of their presence and intentions. So if you plan to sleep until late in the morning, for sure they'll wake you up.

Driving through the unpaved roads off the beaten path can lead to wonderful encounters, like a troop of Coatis eating on the side of the road, or a Chestnut Mandible Toucan eating fresh fruits from a tree. In fact, you get to see a lot more while traveling these roads than walking the trails of the highly visited parks. It's an interesting way of finding wildlife that otherwise would have been almost impossible to see. This practice can also bring a lot of challenges. In one occasion, I was heading to the beaches of Ostionales National Park hoping to catch a glimpse of the Olive Ridley Turtles nesting on the beach. The road was a little muddy, but the worst part came when the road ended in a river, and we had to push the Jeep across the river to continue our trip. Luckily, it was only 2 feet deep, but enough to get us wet.

Unfortunately, we came a little late and most of the nesting activity was over, and all it was left was a few turtles that never made it back to the ocean. On our trip back, we found several species of parrots squawking from nearby palm trees and a Blue-crowned Motmot sitting on a barbed wire, not too photogenic though.

The landscape is amazing, especially the waterfalls embedded in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by exuberant vegetation and beautiful fauna. Walking through shallow creeks under the canopy can produce hundreds of images that denote the wet nature of the rainforest. If there's something in abundance, it's water. Throughout the day, it's common to get unannounced showers and even during a perfectly clear day, the moisture from the Pacific rises over the western slopes and turns into clouds within seconds. Even if it doesn't rain, you'll feel wet when the area gets engulfed in these massive clouds in formation. The

beaches of the Pacific are among the best places to take photos at sunset, as the sun reflects on the wet sandy beaches creating a kaleidoscope of colors.

To experience mother earth in action, it's enough with a visit to Arenal , an active volcano that expels rocks and molten lava almost everyday. Best time to watch is at night on a dry and clear sky. But Costa Rica is not only about the wildlife, their colorful people, the markets, and the daily life around the small towns are really interesting. The same day we arrived to Costa Rica, we decided to go across the Golfo de Nicoya, and we needed to take the ferry. As usual, there were several trucks and cars and many people in bicycles waiting to board the boat. We first thought there was no space for all the vehicles, people, and even live animals that were getting packed in the boat. Incredibly, we all made it in that trip, and to our surprise, as soon as the boat was few hundred feet from the docks, the party began. Open bar on the boat, with beer, sodas and snacks, for a trip that lasted about 30 minutes. We all sat on the open deck of the boat, and enjoyed our trip with drinks in hand. What a cultural experience!

While driving through the rural areas, you'll find all kinds of things that will make you stop, from inviting fruit markets, to artists selling their crafts and even kids blocking the road to collect "toll fees" to raise money for their baseball team. Hope the ones here in the states don't learn those tricks. In a country full of natural riches but economical poverty, it's hard to miss those interesting shots of people, their lifestyle, and their closeness to mother nature. As you drive through this country, pay attention to the little details, like the old guy driving a herd of cows on the road, the water taxi man driving people upstream, or the guy selling roasted chicken on the side of the road. Costa

Rica is a unique country, a little paradise for many that continues to fight development. A paradise that even with all the conservation efforts up to day, might still succumb to the pressures of the economy.



No trip to Costa Rica is complete without a monkey encounter. Spider, Howler, Squirrel and White-faced Capuchins, are the species that call this land their home.



The Children from Tarcoles, Costa Rica *By Nyleen Rodriguez*



In 2016 I had the pleasure to take 14 high school students on a week adventure through Costa Rica. The one thing they liked the most was to spend time with the Tarcoles children. ©R. Munguía

When someone travels abroad, they have the unique opportunity of experiencing the culture of another country and meeting its people. Or one can be the regular tourist that ignores their surroundings and never really learns about the place they are visiting.

About six years ago, while visiting the fishing village of Tarcoles in Costa Rica on the west coast, our group was in search of the Scarlet macaws. These had landed in a tree inside someone's backyard. We asked permission to come in to shoot the pictures and without hesitation, we were allowed in. The family was preparing for a birthday party. That's when we decided to come back that afternoon, crash into their party, and bring ice cream to the kids. Not only that, but we took pictures of everyone with the purpose of bringing back the prints so the families could have them. Some of these families had never had their picture taken. For those that were present, this was a dramatic, life-changing experience.

So, the following year we did it again. This time, we brought toys for all of the kids, plus the ice cream. The parents knew we were coming, so the families prepared gifts for us. They didn't have anything, but they still gave us something. They even cooked for us flan, a traditional dessert. We played soccer with them, the kids took pictures with our fantastic cameras, we spent an amazing time with them. So we decided to ask the parents what was a need of the children

of Tarcoles, and one of the mothers told us that one of their biggest needs were school supplies.

Every year we visit our friends from Tarcoles. We have seen the kids grow and we always bring them lots of school supplies plus toys and, of course, ice cream. Throughout the years, the outpour of help has been phenomenal.

More about our Costa Rica Expeditions

Each expedition receives a theme and name which is decided based on what our goals are for that particular trip. This year's sessions do not have a theme yet, so stay tuned. Want to see more photos from previous expeditions and their theme?

Follow any of the links below for a photo blog.

Costa Rica 2022: **The Macaw Project**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/721566009083948>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/374428257921813>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1096978637693404>

Costa Rica 2019: **The Pandemic Edition**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/517813342980218>

Costa Rica 2019: **The Macaw Project**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/317114615898724>

Costa Rica 2018: **Meeting the King**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1986853474721731>

Costa Rica 2018: **Pejichewy Strikes Back**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/253604715190977>

Costa Rica 2017: **The Quest for the Feathered Serpent**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/922998644498971/>

Costa Rica 2016: **The Sloth Awakens**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/506066376250440/>

Here's a map showing our route for this trip.

