

Tour Report

Cloud Forests, Jungles & Volcanoes

11 – 22 February 2025

Resplendent quetzal



Roseate spoonbill



Red-eyed tree frog



Scarlet macaw



Compiled by Fernando Sanchez

Tuesday 11 February 2025

Day 1:

Santo Domingo de Heredia

We greeted our guests at Juan Santamaria Airport and headed to the beautiful Hotel Bouganvillea. Upon arrival, we had dinner at 6:30 p.m. We got to know each other a bit and went over the itinerary and details for the following day, as they had a long day of travel.

Wednesday 12 February 2025

Day 2:

Vara Blanca - Sarapiquí

This day we left Hotel Bouganvillea for La Quinta Sarapiquí with a tour and lunch at La Paz Waterfall Gardens. It was a beautiful sunny morning, with a scenic Barva-Vara Blanca route and excellent views. Our guests were in a good mood for the adventure.

We arrived and visited the butterfly farm, the hummingbird feeders, and saw monkeys and snakes.

We hiked the waterfall trail, where the guests enjoyed themselves and took several photos. We boarded the shuttle and went to the main building for lunch. We hydrated and headed for Sarapiquí, encountering a flock of coatis along the way. We made a stop at Mirador Cinchona and saw numerous tanagers, warblers, and hummingbirds, which the guests loved. We talked about the history of the place and the impact of the 2009 earthquake on the area. We continued along the route, and it started to rain a little, but we had excellent views of the Sarapiquí River canyon as we descended through Cariblanco and San Miguel.

We arrived at La Quinta and checked in. Then, at 6:30 p.m., we met to check off our bird and wildlife lists and then have a delicious dinner. I went frog-hunting in an area where they are seen and called the guests. We found several red-eyed tree frogs (*Agalychnis callidryas*), even a mating pair, and saw several bats flying near us. We said goodbye to the first day of adventure, and the guests were very grateful.

Thursday 13 February 2025

Day 3:

Sarapiquí

Today, we left right after breakfast for OTS La Selva. We had an introduction to its history, from its beginnings to current projects.

We first took Marañón Avenue and managed to see two two-toed sloths (*Choloepus hoffmanni*), howler monkeys (*Alouatta palliata*), a Black throated Trogon (*Trogon rufus*), and a purple-throated fruitcrow (*Querula purpurata*). Then we crossed the bridge and the central path, where we saw another three-toed sloth (*Bradypus variegatus*).

We went to Pierella Garden for lunch. Cristal came out to greet the guests and told them about her project and the beautiful history of the place. Even though we were only going for lunch, she asked them if they wanted to see a few things, and of course, they said yes. She gave them a mini tour of butterflies, three species of bats, some insects, and poison dart frogs (*Ophaga Pumilio*). If I don't interrupt her, she'll take them all afternoon! We went to lunch, and at a great price, they were able to eat thanks to the activity at the feeding station in front of the lunch table, as they took tons of photos. The lunch was super delicious, as always, with fruit, coffee, and hot chocolate made fresh by Cristal.

We returned to La Selva and took the Cantaranas Trail and part of the experimental trail. Activity was slow due to the intense heat and humidity, but we managed to see several birds and a large number of millipedes

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mating, a colony of bullet ants (*Paraponera clavata*), and white-faced monkeys (*Cebus imitator*).

We returned to the hotel and, after a short break, explored the trails at La Quinta and managed to see some red-eyed tree frogs (*Agalychnis callidrias*), a masked frog (*Smilisca phaeota*), and a caiman (*Caiman crocodilus*). We checked out many species for the day, had a delicious dinner at the hotel, and ended with a short talk about general conservation in Costa Rica.

The guests were extremely grateful for the incredible day. They are in very good health, and we kept them well hydrated to combat the humidity and the typical heat of the area.

Friday 14 February 2025

Day 4:

Sarapiquí - Arenal

After breakfast at Hotel La Quinta, we headed out to the Sarapiquí River with Sarapiquí Adventures. Captain Jose was super attentive and friendly. We got right into it since the best activity is early in the morning. We saw 25 species of birds, including a classic that I was really looking forward to showing off to our guests: the Sungreebe! (*Heliornis fulica*) A super beautiful, graceful little duck that stole one of the morning shows. One of the guests told me I made his day with an osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), we saw up close, grabbing a Machaca for breakfast. It was amazing, along with several kingfishers (*Megaceryle alcyon*) and long-nosed bats! A black river turtle (*Rhinoclemmys funereal*). Another incredible moment was a river otter (*Lontra longicaudis*) going in and out of the water several times. It climbed onto a bank and started doing what they do best: acting like playful dogs (hence their nickname "water dogs"), and of course, the guests were delighted!

On the way back, nature and the river kept us slowed down due to the heat, but they prepared a super concert for us featuring two groups of howler monkeys who seemed to be battling to see who was the strongest. This was a very special moment!

We returned to La Quinta to check out and head to Arenal Observatory Lodge. On the way, we saw a 1.5 metre iguana and a roadside hawk.

We had lunch at Kenko Fortuna, and the guests loved it!

We continued to the Observatory Lodge and, after a rest, we met at 6:15 p.m. for a short nightwalk. Incredibly, we saw a Bocaracá (*Bothriechis schlegelii*), an Olingo (*Bassaricyon gabbii*), and several poison dart frogs! It was incredible.

We made an excellent checklist for the day.

Dinner was excellent.

Saturday 15 February 2025

Day 5:

Arenal

We started at 5:50 am, observing several birds at first light at one of the Arenal Observatory Lodge's feeders. Then came the surprise the guests had in store: The umbrella bird (*Cephalopterus glabricolly*), a spectacular juvenile male feeding on some figs. It was an incredible start to the day. We continued observing more birds, and after breakfast, we toured the hotel's trails. We observed more birds and found a Mexican jumping pit viper (*Atropoides Mexicanus*) and another eye-lashed pit viper. A cloudy and warm morning.

At 10:00, we headed out to a new project I know about in Fortuna called Las Mariolas. There were very few

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people, and despite being a small place, it offers quite a few things, and the guests were delighted to support the small businesses in each area. We found two Fer-de-Lance (*Bothrops asper*), three sloths, including a female with a baby, a boat-billed heron (*Cochlearius Cochlearius*), an emerald basilisk (*Basiliscus plumifrons*), Northern Jacanas (*Jacana spinosa*), a family of 18 tent bats, a jacamar (*Galbula Ruficauda*), manakines (*Manacus candei*), and poison dart frogs.

We had lunch at La Cava Pizza, an excellent choice, the guests told me.

We headed to Místico, and it was raining lightly in some parts, but it cleared up on the suspension bridges.

We had an incredible view from the forest canopy, and we were able to appreciate the different levels here. We saw various lichens and aerial plants, leaf cutter ants (*Atta cephalotes*), a group of white-collared peccaries (*Dicotyles tajacu*) in front of us, a two-toed sloth, a tarantula (*Megaphobema mesomelas*), and howler monkeys.

We returned to the hotel and had dinner. We then went out to look for some owls and found three of the same species: the black & white owl (*Ciccaba nigrolineata*), which were simply gorgeous.

We saw another eye-lashed pit viper and called it a day after nearly 16 hours of contact with nature, the clients exhausted but extremely grateful for another excellent day.

Sunday 16 February 2025

Day 6:

Arenal - Puntarenas

This day's trip went from Observatory Lodge to La Ensenada Lodge.

Before breakfast, we watched birds at the feeder, checked out, and hit the road. Just ten minutes later, we stopped to watch a swallow-tailed kite (*Elanoides forficatus*), and right there, I spotted an anteater (*Tamandua tetradactyla*) across the road! We took several photos and videos; it was a very exciting moment. Just one kilometre further on, we spotted a Laughing Falcon (*Herpetoteres cachinans*) across the road! We continued around the lake with the breathtaking views typical of the area. We stopped at Café&Macadamia for coffee to go. We crossed the Continental Divide and left the cloudy Caribbean sky behind. The sky cleared up, giving us excellent views of the lowlands. We even saw Nicaragua's Concepción Volcano. Before reaching Tilarán, we encountered a group of howler monkeys very close with several babies. We also stopped for more photos and videos.

We had lunch at Mi Finca in Limonal, and we all ordered the Guanacaste dish, which was super delicious, and the guests loved it. We saw three red scarlet macaws right there before continuing the trip. It started to rain on the way, but as we reached La Ensenada, it stopped again. We checked in and had dinner at 7:00 pm. Halfway through dinner, a house cat was exploring the vegetation, so I went to see what it was and found a beautiful Lyra Snake (*Trimorphodon quadruplex*). The guests were delighted because it was super docile, and I took close-up photos and videos of it with their phones.

The guests are very grateful for today.

Monday 17 February 2025

Day 7:

La Ensenada Lodge

We had coffee at 5:30 am and headed out for the boat tour, which was supposed to be to the Bebedero River. We were greeted by Captain Adolfo and his assistant, Jose, who were very friendly. We started with a bunch of shorebirds, and then I told them to keep going so we could get to the river, since it's not that close. They

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told me that their itinerary was for the mangroves and the Tempisque River. Leaving at that time, if we went to the Bebedero, it would take 40 minutes there and 40 minutes back. Another departure was scheduled for that tour, so I wasn't going to take the clients there and return around 9:30-10:00 without breakfast. We were already on the water, and it didn't seem right to turn back, so we had to figure it out. We did the Gulf, visiting several islets and the mangroves, which were just too good. We saw a large number of seabirds like pelicans (*Pelecanus occidentalis*), frigate birds (*Fregata magnificens*), and gulls. We saw four lesser nighthawks (*Chordeiles acutipennis*), one raccoon (*Procyon Lotor*), several ospreys, roseate spoonbills (*Platalea ajaja*), one crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*), one common black hawk (*Buteogallus anthracinus*). In the end, we did a 2:40 hour tour and the clients were very satisfied.

We went birdwatching from the reception right after breakfast until 1:00 pm. We stopped for lunch and saw quite a few birds on the main road.

We had lunch, changed, and got ready for the tractor tour with Grandpa (Don Luis). Excellent service. We continued looking for more birds and adding good species to the lists on the main road. We went to the salt ponds, and there the number of birds is always incredible, literally thousands. Some highlights from this point were short-billed dowitchers (*Limnodromus griseus*), spoonbills, marbled godwit (*Limosa fedoa*), flocks of hundreds of sandpipers, and the icing on the cake was a long-billed curlew! (*Numenius americanus*).

We followed the path to the lagoon and found a purple gallinule (*Porphyrio martinicus*) and a crocodile. We went up to the lookout point, and Ariel from the staff had a surprise of cheese and wine ready for us. This surprised the guests, as we arrived just in time to enjoy today's incredible sunset. They took many photos and videos from the lookout point.

We hadn't yet seen one of the classics here: the Alcarabán (*Burhinus bistriatus*), but since we never give up, I told Grandpa, and he said he'd give us an extra ride to look for it. It took us an hour to find it! But we saw a beautiful pair in one of the pastures. The guests were super happy because, aside from the spoonbill, this was the one they really wanted to see, so we celebrated!

After a 4.5-hour tour, we arrived for dinner.

Already exhausted, we made our list to rest after another 15-hour day of wildlife watching.

Tuesday 18 February 2025

Day 8:

Puntarenas

Today we left La Ensenada Lodge for Hotel Villa Lapas, visiting Carara National Park. On the way out, we stopped by a turquoise-browed motmot (*Eumomota superciliosa*) and took a photo. It turned out great since it was a sunny day and we saw it quite close. We arrived at Carara, checked in, and headed into the forest. The humidity and temperature were high for the time of day, but we still managed to see a group of white-faced capuchin monkeys and take some good photos. We also managed to get several birds, including a black-throated trogon, a little Tinamou (*Crypturellus soui*), red scarlet macaws (*Ara macao*), and a yellow-throated toucan (*Ramphastos ambiguus*).

We went out to lunch at La Ostra, and the guests were delighted with the seafood and local food. We went back to the hotel and checked in. The guests rested for a while. At 6:30 pm, we went frog hunting and took several photos of the red-eyed tree frog. Then we had dinner, and the guests were very pleased with the day.

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Wednesday 19 February 2025

Day 9:

Tarcoles

This day we left the Villa Lapas Hotel for the boat tour on the Tarcoles River with EcoJungle. Captain Emilio was waiting for us and had a very good attitude. We saw a large number of aquatic birds and several crocodiles. We saw roseate spoonbills, ringed kingfishers, frigate birds, and brown pelicans in breeding plumage, several sandpipers, red scarlet macaws, yellow-headed caracara (*Milvago chimachima*), gulls, a pregnant female and juvenile crocodiles, and also "Tornado", one of the largest crocodiles in this river. The guests had a great time.

We left the river and managed to spot a group of red scarlet macaws in the distance. We drove there and we saw a wonderful display of more than 45 individuals together making their typical loud calls, some of them mating! In the middle of a forest edge near the river, nature gave us one of the most incredible gifts. We had this whole group of macaws with us, and none of us spoke; we just watched this great private show right above us.

We went to lunch and returned to the hotel. At 2:00 pm, we went to the skywalk. We saw a two-toed sloth, several leaf-cutter ants, a mixed flock of birds, white-faced monkeys, incredible views, and many beautiful trees such as Pochote (*Pachira quinata*), Pilón (*Hieronyma alchorneoides*), Balsa (*Ochroma pyramidale*), Guayacan (*Guaiacum sanctum*), Guanacaste (*Enterolobium cyclocarpum*), among others.

We had dinner at the hotel and made bird and wildlife lists.

The guests were super happy with another excellent day!

Thursday 20 February 2025

Day 10:

Puntarenas – Cerro de la Muerte

On this sunny day, we left Villa Lapas, leaving the beautiful transitional forest behind, heading for the highlands of the mystical cloud forest of the Talamanca mountain range, right up to Trogon Lodge.

We stopped along the way in Dominical for some delicious fruit smoothies, famous in that area. We continued uphill until we reached one of my special places to not only have lunch, but also to enjoy a beautiful cultural experience with a family from Siberia, Costa Rica, dedicated to the preservation of the cloud forest, planting oaks and wild avocado trees—without a doubt the best blackberries in the world, certified by a researcher from the University of Costa Rica (UCR), and, of course, the best shiitake mushrooms in this part of the world (aside from Bhutan). In addition, we enjoyed a delicious rice pudding accompanied by grated coconut and chiverre honey. The guests loved this surprise! They took photos with Doña Silvia and Don Martín, and they mentioned to me that "this is what they want!" After dessert and coffee, we headed to Savegre Valley and checked into the Trogon Lodge with Greivin, who welcomed us wonderfully as always!

It was raining, so we took a break and had dinner at 8 pm.

We made bird lists, which were few, but it was a great day.

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Friday 21 February 2025

Day 11:

Savegre Valley-Copey Valley

This day we started very early in search of one of the most wonderful and beautiful birds in the world, without a doubt! The Resplendent Quetzal! (*Pharomachrus mocinno*) The plumed serpent! The famous Long-tailed Quetzal, King of the mystical cloud forests!

Since I had plan A, plan B, plan C, and plan D in mind, the Resplendent Quetzal's nest at the Trogón Hotel was unstable. The hotel's own trail had its chance, but it was wet from the rain, and I thought it was dangerous for guests because it was slippery. The Indian's Loop and the Cat's Loop (places nearby) offer a chance to see them, but you have to move quickly, and it wasn't the best option because it's heely.

Another nest that is located in Manantiales, down in the valley, but it's 50 metres from the fence, and at least 50-60 people were expected to arrive since it's public. So at 4:45 we left for Copey Valley! We stopped by Eladio Salazar, who monitors the nests in that area. He told me there was one already active, and of course, it was just for us, with an excellent eye-level view!

We arrived after stopping for a coffee and saw several males at some distance putting on a display to attract and establish territory for females!

At 7:30, we went to the nest, and the Quetzal did not make it easy for us this time. He made us wait to see if we were worthy of admiring his beauty and his very long tail! Ready with cameras and telescopes, he was surely watching us from somewhere in the distance testing us but even though we hadn't had breakfast and we were standing a little anxiously I told the customers that if they were patient the jackpot was going to come because at this point my hope was relentless, I knew we deserved to see him arrive at the nest and pose, after an hour and a half of patience and waiting talking softly to go unnoticed the famous feathered serpent decided it was time to give us the prize we were waiting for and suddenly putting on an incredible display of beauty and announcing his arrival at the perch one metre from the nest and ten metres from our cameras, he came under the sky in the middle of the cloud forest canopy with such presence that he scared without hesitation an unfortunate lessons motmot (*Momotus coeruliceps*) that was resting on the perch where the Quetzal would arrive, he also perched on the cable that passed halfway along the way giving us both angles to take about 500 photos in total, there are no words to really describe the excitement of seeing him like that.

Eladio took us to his home, and his wife, María, made us a delicious breakfast with gallo pinto, eggs, homemade tortillas, and natural local cheese.

Then we went to Batsú Garden, where Felipe Chacón was waiting for us. Excellent service, as always, and a great spot for bird photography, where we saw 27 species, including a shiny cowbird (*Molothrus donariensis*) and King vulture (*Sarcoramphus papa*), rare for the area, which thrilled the guests. Felipe gave us extra time at the place. Then we went up to Miriam's Soda for lunch and to visit the feeder, another excellent option with 25 species that day.

We went back to the hotel, and after a short break at 6:30 pm, we made bird lists and had dinner at the hotel.

Saturday 22 February 2025

Day 12:

Dota - Alajuela

We left Trogon Lodge for Hotel Buena Vista and visited the Poás Volcano National Park.

Rain, fog, and intermittent sunshine descended from the Talamanca mountain range, but with incredible views. We made a rest stop in Cartago and continued to the Poás Volcano. Unfortunately, it was very foggy,

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and we didn't see the crater, although it was nice to walk a bit in that beautiful forest.

We went down to Freddo Fresas restaurant for lunch, although they don't take reservations on weekends, Freddo made room for us, so we skipped the line. Freddo brought us two plates of strawberries and blackberries, which the guests loved. I also introduced them to him and told them a little about the beautiful history of the place. The lunch was delicious, as always, and the service was excellent.

We continued to the Buena Vista Hotel. We met again at 7 p.m., but the guests didn't want dinner since we had eaten so much at lunch. We concluded a successful tour with not only excellent memories but also a good number of wildlife species throughout the adventure.

The clients told me this trip was memorable and that they carry Costa Rica in their hearts.

Images by Fernando Sanchez

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