

EXPLORE

Costa Rica by 4x4

29 Days
08 Apr - 06 May 2027
Accommodation based



Self Drive
ADVENTURES
GUIDED TAGALONG TOURS

www.selfdriveadventures.com

The Route



Costa Rica...

Discover Costa Rica like never before! This small Central American gem is renowned for its incredible biodiversity, and with our expert local team specialising in 4x4 adventures, you'll explore places most visitors can only dream of reaching.

From active volcanoes to stunning Pacific coast beaches, lush national parks teeming with unique wildlife, and hidden gems off the beaten path, every moment promises to be unforgettable. Get ready for the adventure of a lifetime!

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The Itinerary

1

San Jose

Arrive in San Jose and be transferred to hotel. Afternoon briefing followed by a welcome dinner. Our cars will be delivered to the hotel this evening. Dinner included



2

San Jose - Turrialba

We will take the route of the volcanoes (Turrialba and Irazu) and also a visit to Cartago, the old capital of the country where we will visit the largest Catholic Church in Costa Rica. The next two nights we will spend in a guest house run by a Costa Rican family with an astonishing view of the Turrialba Volcano. Breakfast, lunch & dinner included



3

Turrialba

Full day in Turrialba. In the morning we will visit the archaeological site of Guayabo, Costa Rica's largest archaeological site, offers a glimpse into an ancient civilization dating back over 3,000 years. Nestled in lush forest near Turrialba, it features stone roads, aqueducts, petroglyphs, and a fascinating cultural history. Breakfast, lunch & dinner included



4

Turrialba - Puerto Viejo

Depart for the region of Limón. We will join the busy main highway and see boats waiting to be unloaded in Moin, the largest commercial harbour in the country. We will pass through colourful villages on our way to the seaside town of Puerto Viejo known for its "chilled vibe" and green macaws. If you are lucky you might spot your first sloth here. Breakfast & lunch included



5

Puerto Viejo

Take a morning dip in the Caribbean Sea before our tour to the Bribri Indigenous Territory located in the tropical rainforest of Talamanca. The tour starts in the village of Bambú, where we will meet the local guide and then travel by dugout canoe up the spectacular Yorkín river until the village of Yorkín. We will see organic cacao and banana plantations and take a swim in the refreshing waters of the Tskui River before experiencing a Bribri style lunch. For dessert, you will be shown how to traditionally produce chocolate and can try organic bananas submerged in freshly made chocolate sauce. We'll learn how to use the traditional bow and arrow and how to weave the leaves for a traditional roof. We will finish the tour around 3pm and travel back to our hotel. Have dinner in the hotel or try a restaurant in the small town.

Breakfast & lunch included



6

Puerto Viejo - Poas Volcano

We will leave after an early breakfast and head north and stop at a heart of palm farm for a tour and lunch. We'll then continue on to our accommodation in a peaceful and tranquil haven high up in the cloud forest close to the Poas Volcano. The lodge is immersed in 10 acres of astonishing and lush gardens and surrounded by a working dairy farm and primary forest.

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included



7

Poas - Sarapiquí Valley

Today we explore the region of the Poas Volcano National Park. This crater is 1,320m in diameter and is considered to be the second-largest active crater in the world. We have the chance to view the La Paz Waterfall and take a walk in the Laguna de Hule area. In the afternoon we reach Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí, the ancient meeting point of the Huetar tribe on the commercial routes between the Mayan and Inca Empires. In this area, there are plantations of pineapple, palm, yucca, plantain and maize.

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included



8

Sarapiquí - Boca Tapada

We continue our journey to the isolated region of Boca Tapada located in the plains of the Caribbean near the northern border Costa Rica shares with Nicaragua. We will be on quiet and remote tracks today. There could be some mud (fingers crossed). It's likely to see colourful birds along the way, particularly because it is the habitat of the green macaws (Ara Ambigua).

Breakfast & lunch included



9

Boca Tapada

Full day in the Boca Tapada region to choose from optional activities that include bird watching, kayaking or just relaxing in nature. Book these activities at reception. Breakfast included



10

Boca Tapada - Cano Negro

Our adventure in the northern part of the country continues. We plan to visit a pineapple cooperative and have a local lunch. Then we will continue on the road to Cano Negro, one of the most important biological areas of the country and one of the top four most important lowlands of the world. In 1991, the wildlife refuge of Cano Negro was designated to be one of the three "Ramsar" places of Costa Rica. "Ramsar" is the intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. This ecological treasure is the natural habitat for more than 350 species of birds such as the American Jabiru and other animals including the Emerald Basilic, green iguanas, river turtles, caimans, monkeys and jaguars. Breakfast, lunch & dinner included



11

Cano Negro - La Fortuna

On our early morning boat trip we'll experience the richness of the biodiversity of the Cano Negro Wildlife Refuge. We will have lunch at the hotel after the boat tour and depart for the Arenal Volcano, known for the almost perfect conical shape of its crater and known as one of the must-see destinations of Costa Rica. We will have a free afternoon to explore the region including the Arenal volcano national park or the hot springs. Breakfast & lunch included



12

La Fortuna

We have the day to enjoy the area starting with a trail of 3.4 km where we can observe nature from a very different angle. We will cross hanging bridges that will give us the opportunity to experience the famous canopy. After lunch in a local restaurant, we will go in search of 3 and 2 toed sloths before heading to our accommodation. Have your dinner in the hotel or enjoy one of the many restaurants in La Fortuna. Breakfast & lunch included



13

La Fortuna - Rincón de la Vieja

On our way to Rincon de la Vieja, our route continues to the north through the mountains of Guanacaste bordering the Arenal Lake, passing through the route between the Miravalles and Tenorio volcanos, to reach the region of Rincón la Vieja National Park. We will spend the next two nights on a working cacao farm. Look out for the hummingbirds in the gardens outside the quaint cabins. Breakfast & dinner included



14

Rincón de la Vieja

We spend the morning discovering the volcanic activity of Rincón la Vieja National Park. A 3 km hike takes us to the area called "Las Pailas" where, through a path in the dry tropical forest, we can observe closely the volcanic activity and small active craters. We'll have a late lunch back at La Anita and take the chocolate tour for dessert. Breakfast, lunch & dinner included



15

Rincón de la Vieja - Nosara

We'll make our way toward the coast, passing through Liberia, the key city in the northern region of Costa Rica. Next, we'll traverse Santa Cruz in Guanacaste, a town celebrated for its cattle ranching heritage and traditional "Sabaneros" cowboys.

Our route takes us through Diria National Park, reaching the peninsula's highest points, where breathtaking coastal views await. From there, we'll descend close to the shoreline, where today's journey concludes. Breakfast & lunch included



16

Nosara - Playa Carillo

An easy morning before we take the coastal route south towards the Nicoya Peninsula. It's only around one hour to the small town of Playa Carillo. We plan to arrive before lunchtime so that you have time to organise an activity for afternoon or relax in the hotel. Have dinner in the hotel or try one of the local restaurants like the El Colbri steak house.

Breakfast included



17

Playa Carillo - Paquera

Today our route of the Nicoya Peninsular will depend on the tides and weather. Hopefully, we'll enjoy some beach driving and water crossings. In the afternoon we will arrive at our lodge near Paquera, with panoramic ocean views. Breakfast, lunch & dinner included



18

Paquera

Day free to explore or just enjoy the view and relax. There are optional activities like a night kayak luminescence tour (highly recommended) or the Isla Tortuga snorkeling tour. You can visit San Lucas Island which was famous as a Prison Colony from 1873 to 1991. It was well known as home to some of the worst criminals in Costa Rica and is called "The Island of Lonely Men". You can discover the church, the cells, hundreds of graffiti and large drawings that are painted on the walls of the cells, and much more. Isla San Lucas is a national wildlife refuge and a tourist destination today. We are not far from the Curu wildlife refuge if you would like a day of wildlife observation.

Breakfast included



19

Paquera - Tarcoles

The day starts with a ferry that connects the Nicoya Peninsula to Puntarenas. We will take the route called the "Costanera" to the small town of Tarcoles, where on our boat tour we venture into the ecosystem of large crocodiles and a great number of wild birds that live in one of the largest mangrove forests of the country. After lunch, our destination will be the Tulin River where we spend one night in a charming lodge set in nature.

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included



20

Tarcoles - Savegre River

Take an early morning walk on the paths of the property to enjoy the tranquillity of the lodge. Our route will take around 3 hours to a special lunch and swim in the river before winding our way through the mountains until we find the Rafiki Lodge on the Savegre River, considered one of the cleanest rivers in Latin America.

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included



21

Savegre River

Day free to explore or just enjoy the colourful birds visiting the bird feeders in the lodge and relax. There are optional activities from the lodge such as a short hike, rafting or horse riding. 1 hour drive (40km) away is Los Campesinos Ecolodge where there are longer walks and hanging bridges. If you'd like to take a day drive your guide will lead a full day driving circuit in the area.

Breakfast included



22

Savegre River - Drake Bay

We continue our path to the Southern Pacific coast and take the "Costanera" road passing large palm plantations before arriving at the village of Sierpe, the door of the Osa Peninsula. We will see many beautiful trails and outstanding landscapes and after some river crossings we will arrive at Drake Bay which is the last village before arriving at the Corcovado National Park.

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included



23

Drake Bay

The main activity today is discovering Corcovado National Park with a nature guide. We are collected on the beach by our boat which takes us to the National Park. Corcovado is considered another jewel of the Costa Rican national parks system and it is known worldwide for its incredible biodiversity. The first pioneers here were gold miners, braving the inhospitable conditions to exploit the natural resources that seemed inexhaustible. Thanks to the creation of the Corcovado National Park the damage that had been done has been halted. With only forty thousand hectares, the Corcovado has more than 5% of the planet's biodiversity and more than 10% of the species of mammals on the American continent. We will have a local lunch at the end of our tour before we are taken back to the hotel by our boat.

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included



24

Drake Bay - San Vito

Once we reach the South Pacific, we will begin the return journey to the Central Valley in several stages. The first one will be the small and little-visited town of San Vito. This village was created by Italian immigrants who saw the possibility of a better future in their mountains. The route between mountains and overlooking the sea leads us to 1,500m and right on the border of Panama. We plan to have lunch with sweeping views to Panama.

Breakfast included



25

San Vito

San Vito is known locally for being a region of coffee producers but also is known for hosting one of the eight communities of indigenous people of the country – the Guaymi community. In these places 4x4 vehicles are not a luxury, but the main means of transportation since most of the access is via dirt roads. We will visit this community accompanied by local guides and enjoy both the drive and the culture of this place. Lunch is included in the Guaymi visit.

Breakfast & lunch included



26

San Vito - San Gerardo de Dota

Today we begin the ascent to the high mountains of the Cordillera de Talamanca. We plan to stop for lunch in the cloud forest. We will stay for two days in the area around San Gerardo de Dota, where we can see the famous Quetzal. The Quetzal is considered a mythical bird by Mayans and the Aztecs. We can see the Quetzal in these mountains at not lower than 2,000m often perched on Aguacatillo trees (wild avocado). This mountainous region is ideal for bird watchers, nature lovers and hikers.

Breakfast included



27

San Gerardo de Dota

We'll look for Quetzals today and then have a day free to take a hike or just enjoy the amazing nature of the area which is alive with birds. Breakfast included

28

San Gerardo de Dota - San Jose

Our final drive back to San Jose. The area we drive through is renowned for its production of high quality coffee. We will visit a cooperative called Coopedota for a coffee tour, tasting and lunch. We will arrive at the hotel in the afternoon around 4.30pm and enjoy for our last meal together. Breakfast, lunch & dinner included

29

Depart

Transfer to airport for departure flights.

Itinerary is subject to change.

The final route may change due to weather, road conditions, decisions by authorities or the guide on site.

The hotels along the route will be those mentioned or ones similar in standard according to availability.

Pre & Post Tour Accommodation...

If you'd like arrive a day or two early to acclimatise and get over a long flight or stay longer, we can arrange additional nights in the same hotel. Prices to be advised closer to the date.





Prices, Dates...

Prices...

USD14,930* per person

- Prices are based on 2 people per 4x4 on a double/twin share basis
- 3rd and 4th passenger: we can provide pricing if you have more than 2 people per 4x4
- Single supplement to upgrade to single accommodation is USD3,905 per person

2027 pricing only. 2028 pricing will be available approximately April 2027. Prices assume a minimum of 4 vehicles and a maximum of 7 vehicles (plus support vehicles). Prices are subject to exchange rate fluctuations – please see booking form for all terms and conditions. If we do not have the 4 vehicle minimum the tour can still operate with a small group supplement. For 3 vehicles USD1,200 per person. You can indicate on booking if you are interested in traveling if the small group supplement applies or only if the 4 car prices apply.

Inclusions...

Arrival and departure transfers, accommodation, vehicle hire (Toyota Land Cruiser Prado or similar) with unlimited mileage and all terrain tyres, driver fees for two people, vehicle insurance (full insurance "titanium pack" with zero deductible), two-way radio, all hotels (including hotel taxes), meals including all breakfasts, 14 dinners and 19 lunches – there are around 20 meals not included in the itinerary, local English/Spanish speaking tour guide and assistant, activities as listed in the itinerary. The first aid kit is in the escort car, as is all recovery equipment.

Exclusions...

Airfares return to Costa Rica (approx. AUD3,000 from Australia economy fare), fuel (approx. USD500 per car), alcoholic drinks, 18 meals not included in the itinerary approx USD17 to USD45 per meal depending on location, taxes of any private property passage (if required), local tips, travel insurance, Costa Rica departure tax approx. USD29, activities over and above those detailed in the suggested (activities can be from USD20 to USD95 per activity), visas (if required), immunisations (if required) and any personal expenses. A vehicle security deposit of USD1,000 (paid only on credit card). Two drivers are included, and additional drivers are at a cost of approx. USD6 per day of car hire and a cleaning fee of approx. USD20 may apply depending on the condition of the car when returned.

Dates...

29 Days

08 Apr - 06 May, 2027

Accommodation Based





Other Information

Accommodation...

This is not a 5-star holiday. It is an adventure staying in a combination of small hotels, cabins, bungalows, permanent tents, lodges and homestays. These are generally located outside the big cities but have the necessary amenities such as private bathrooms and hot water. The accommodation is simple but allows us to access our "off the beaten track" adventure.

Driving Ability & Conditions...

4x4 experience is required. You will also need a driver's license. You drive on the right-hand side of the road (left hand drive 4x4). The route is planned largely avoiding main roads with extensive travel off-road and on remote tracks, trails, beaches, and through river crossings. The conditions can be affected greatly by weather. What one day might be "mild" 4x4 driving the next day could be more challenging mainly due to rainfall.

Please discuss your level of 4x4 experience with our team. In and around what we call the Centre Valley (San José, Alajuela, Cartago and Heredia) which are the four main Costa Rican cities, traffic will be very busy and not always easy to follow, but once out of town the roads are generally easy going. We will drive on tar roads, dirt roads, muddy trails and sandy 4x4 tracks.

We will most likely encounter some water crossings. Expect dust, sand and rough conditions to be normal on this adventure. The average distance travelled between two stages is 150km. There are some long days when we need to get between destinations. This tour is focused on observing and enjoying nature so between stages and during the stay in a region there are several activities outside the 4x4 driving planned. The roads and trails will take you to remote areas less frequented by tourists. Due to weather conditions routes may need to change during the tour.



Vehicles...

The standard vehicle used for this tour is a 4x4 4 door Toyota Land Cruiser Prado or similar – the rental supply conditions in Costa Rica often changes. These cars can easily take up to 4 people comfortably. These vehicles will be automatic. Fuel is not included - budget approx. USD700 per 4x4.

Convoy Size...

The minimum number of 4x4s in our convoy is 4, unless a small group surcharge is added, and the maximum is 7. This excludes support vehicles. Most vehicles tend to have just two guests, however, up to four can be accommodated. The convoy does travel together for most of the journey, so you need to be willing to be flexible to fit in with the determined start time each day, stops for breaks etc. We try to allow breaks for photos, toilet stops, sightseeing, activities, wildlife viewing, lunch, morning and afternoon tea. In some places part of the day may be "free" where we will give a certain meeting point to regroup. However, any times where the route has some degree of difficulty the convoy will stay together.

Guide & Support Team...

On this adventure you will be guided by a bilingual Costa Rican naturalist guide and assistant(s). The decision of the local guide is final on all matters likely to affect the safety or well-being of any person participating in the trip. There is no Self Drive Adventures escort on the tour.

Focus of Adventure...

The focus of this adventure is definitely around wildlife and birding observation. This does mean many early starts. There are many scheduled activities as well as optional activities that allow ample time for wildlife experiences.

Daylight Hours

In April-May you can expect around 12 hours of daylight each day, as Costa Rica is close to the equator. The sun generally rises around 5:30 AM and sets around 5:30 PM, with slight variations depending on the specific location within the country. To arrive at our destinations before dark, we do need to get going early so expect early starts to make the most of the adventure.

Food & Drinks...

Meals include all breakfasts, 14 dinners and 19 lunches – there are around 20 meals not included in the itinerary. The food ranges from simple to excellent depending on the location with variety and some very tasty local dishes. Beers, wine and cocktails are of good quality. Meals and wine you can expect to pay similar to at home in the more touristic parts of Costa Rica, but beers and cocktails are usually less expensive. Lunch will often be en route in small local restaurants or as a picnic along the trail to enjoy the natural environment. In 98% of Costa Rica the water is potable, so there is no problem in consuming fruit or vegetables during meals and we recommend having you own water bottle and fill it during the day.



Weather...

In Costa Rica you must keep in mind that it can always rain, and it can always be sunny at any time and all year long. As Costa Rica is a country of microclimates, during the same day we can go from rainy conditions on one side of the Central or Volcanic range to sunny on the other side or be 35 degrees C on the coast and move to 15 degrees C in the hills. The average temperature during these months is 25 degrees C with a relative humidity of 80%. It is recommended to always have a rain jacket or poncho handy and due to high levels of humidity is recommended to bring light clothing that will dry easily.

Flights...

Before booking flights and other arrangements it is your responsibility to confirm with us that we have the minimum number of cars required for this adventure to depart.

Activity Level...

This trip is not physically demanding as any walking activity is usually optional. Activities such as visits to national parks are generally a hike of approximately 4km in high humidity conditions and variable in conditions of the path. A trekking pole is recommended if you have some difficulty on rough terrain or stairs.

Risks & Health...

By participating you acknowledge that the nature of the trip is adventurous, and participation involves a degree of personal risk. To visit Costa Rica there are no mandatory vaccinations. However, there are hepatitis A & B, malaria, typhoid fever and other health risks. You should discuss the risks with your doctor before agreeing to join this trip. Being in the tropics, it is always recommended having enough sunscreen and insect repellent. Pharmacies are easily accessible. The health system, both public and private, is considered of good quality and as Costa Rica is a relatively small country you are never completely away from a health centre.

Amenities & Toilet Breaks...

All accommodation has private bathroom facilities. During the tour and during the planned activities, most of the time you can find clean public restrooms in good condition. If not, we will stop for a "bush toilet" stop where there may be cover of trees or bushes for privacy.

Other Info...

Electricity is 110 volts and the plugs are flat like the American type. Most cell phones operate without a problem in Costa Rica. It is recommended to buy a SIM card from the operator "Kolbi" because that is the one with better coverage throughout the country. Internet access is common and accessible.



FAN MAIL

Zoo Without Fences

I have long wanted to visit Costa Rica. I had been told that it is like “a zoo without fences” and that sounded brilliant.

When Self Drive Adventures advertised that they were offering a month-long trip in the country, we jumped at it. This was to be our 5th trip with them, which should tell you just how enjoyable and interesting they have all been. So now, after this 4WD experience in wild nature, I can definitely say that this trip ranks right at the top of our favourite adventures!

The animal and bird life was prolific. Think armadillos in the garden, sloths lazing in trees, tapirs snoozing by day, howler monkeys acting as early morning alarm clocks, hummingbirds shimmering in flight, toucans and macaws and so many other stunning birds, you'll lose count. And not only was the volcanic and coastal landscape stunning, there was also an amazing and varied amount of 4WDing to satisfy enthusiasts. We tackled rocks, mud, steep mountains, beaches, rivers and more rivers. To say we avoided normal and main roads would be an understatement – we were truly off the beaten track! Our local guides, Gustavo and Greco, were especially adept at get us into and out of “interesting” situations with grace, good humour and a high level of competence and knowledge. They were incomparable!

Costa Rica may be small and out of the way for Australians, but we drove around 3500 kms and can truly say we've had the experience of a lifetime there. Just go!

Sue & Russ Smith, Sydney Australia



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