TOUR CODE

CR2

ADVENTURESABROAD

COSTA RICA & NICARAGUA

Treasures of the Rich Coast

14 days

Updated 14/06/2013

Day 1 ***Arrival in San Jose***

Today we arrive in San Jose, Costa Rica.

Overnight in San Jose. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 ***San Jose - Tortuguero***

This morning we travel by bus from San Jose through Braulio Carillo National Park, one of Costa Rica's largest. Later we visit a working banana plantation and pass through a region known for its cocoa production. We then board our riverboat and spend the afternoon journeying through myriad interconnecting rivers and canals that take us finally to the Caribbean coast and Tortuguero Park.

The park is a water thoroughfare which is a 160 km (100 mile) stretch of natural rivers, lagoons and estuaries, and connecting man-made waterways that run almost to the Nicaraguan border. The canal is the main "highway" of the northern coastal region, complete with directional signs and branches from the main trunk route.

As we go along the canal, keep a keen lookout for views of pastel-coloured toucans and monkeys of various type; if we're lucky, a lazy sloth hanging from a branch, and maybe a coati or two roaming the forest. Stands of mangroves and water hyacinth appear here and there. Scattered along the way are people, too -- fishers and farmers whose dugouts serve all the purposes of pickup trucks elsewhere. Mostly the banks remain wild, and the calls of monkeys and whistles of birds predominate over the noises of humans.

Overnight in Tortuguero. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 3 ***Tortuguero: Forest Walk & Village***

Tortuguero Park is a fascinating place to explore. An early morning boat ride offers an opportunity to observe an awakening coastal rain forest full of lush vegetation and unique bird life.

After lunch we visit the village of Tortuguero accessible only by river boat; you may choose to walk on the Caribbean beach where several turtle species lay their eggs each year. We will visit the Tortuguero Museum with its excellent displays pertaining to the ecology of the area and an informative video presentation specific to turtle conservation in Tortuguero and the entire Caribbean region.

NOTE: The exact order of our activities in Tortuguero may vary depending on weather and other variables.

Overnight in Tortuguero. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 4 *Tortuguero - Baldi Hotsprings - Arenal Volcano*

After an early breakfast we travel by boat 1½-hour from Tortuguero to the Cano Blanco dock. From there we continue by road (+/- 5 hours) to the La Fortuna / Arenal area.

We travel through rolling hills covered with sugar cane fields to overnight near Arenal Volcano. We make a stop at the Baldi Hotsprings (located near Arenal and outside the Risk Zones established by the National Prevention of Risks and Emergency Commission). Here a geothermally-heated river flows through beautifully landscaped grounds featuring many plant and tree species and great birdlife. We will have time to relax in or around the various pools (bring a towel). The springs feature several hot pools with different temperatures fed by individual springs and three swim-up bars.

This evening (weather & volcanic activity permitting) we can view the volcano.

Overnight at Arenal / La Fortuna. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Arenal - Monteverde Cloud Forest*

Today we travel through a rustic rural countryside to the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve area (+/- 4 hours).

Covered in a mantle of moss, ferns and orchids, this private reserve is home to over 400 species of birds and a great number of animals. The forest is created by the winds, particular temperature and moisture conditions, and mountainous topography which combine during the dry season to hold a steady cloud cover along the continental divide. The rains and the moisture in the air nourish trees and plants rooted in the ground, as well as many plants that live at the upper levels of the forest, and take their nutrients directly from the mist and dust that pass through the air. The result is an enchanted fairy-tale environment where trees are laden with orchids, bromeliads, mosses and ferns that obscure their branches, where the moisture and mild temperatures and sunlight filtered by the forest canopy encourage the exuberance of begonias, heliconias, philodendron and many other tropical plants in every available space on the ground.

This afternoon we have a guided tour of the "Butterfly Garden" where butterflies and other endemic insects are raised and protected in a controlled environment allowing scientists to study them -- their place in the food chain and their response to things like increased pollution and climate change.

Overnight at Monteverde. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Monteverde Cloud Forest*

We have a full morning exploring the cloud forest reserve with the help of a local naturalist guide. There is more to the forest than the trees and lesser plants. Of over 320 bird species, the most notable is the quetzal with its long arc of tail feathers. Assorted trogons in addition to the quetzal inhabit the reserve, along with more than 50 varieties of hummingbird. About 500 kinds of butterfly are found at Monteverde. Among the more than 100 mammalian species are howler, white-faced and spider monkeys, coatis and their cousins, raccoons; as well as the rarely observed pumas, ocelots, jaguars, tapirs, and kinkajous.

This afternoon you may choose to go on an optional "Canopy Walk" excursion, located within the cloud forest. Suspension foot-bridges are strung across deep gorges allowing one to get a bird's eye view of the forest from a totally different perspective than we experienced this morning. At a leisurely pace, one can complete this easy and fascinating walk in about 90 minutes. Your Tour Leader can help you plan this activity (optional cost approx $25-40, subject to

change).

REMEMBER: This can be a wet and windy place by definition. You should be prepared for varied conditions.

Overnight at Monteverde. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Monteverde - Quepos*

This morning we descend from the interior mountains to the Pacific Coast and continue southward to the town of Quepos, gateway for the Manuel Antonio National Park, an unspoiled haven of natural beauty on the shores of the Pacific.

Overnight in Quepos. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Manuel Antonio National Park*

This morning we enjoy a leisurely walk through part of Manuel Antonio Park. While strolling the forest trails and the white sand beaches, we'll likely encounter monkeys, iguanas, sea creatures and bird life of amazing variety. After our morning walk, you may like to continue to explore the park and return to the hotel by taxi on your own.

Manuel Antonio National Park is an area of sand curving around a bay strewn with islands of rock, and shaded by green bordering forests. All are backdropped by dramatic cliffs. Manuel Antonio beach is one of the few places in Costa Rica where unspoiled primary forest grows right to the high-tide mark, allowing visitors to bathe at times in the shade.

South Espadilla is the northernmost of the park's beaches, followed by calmer Manuel Antonio beach, offshore of which are some coral spots. Third Beach has tidal pools where brightly coloured fish and eels are temporarily stranded. Last is Puerto Escondido, access to which is made difficult by the bordering rocky promontory.

Overnight in Quepos. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Quepos - Rincon de la Vieja*

Today we head north again on the Pan-American Highway and travel to Rincon de la Vieja National Park.

The Rincon de La Vieja National Park is located in the mountain range of Guanacaste, province of Guanacaste and Alajuela. The active volcano's slopes are covered with both wet and dry forests that contain hidden lakes, rivers and waterfalls and an abundance of wildlife -- the resplendent quetzal, three-wattle bellbirds, morpho butterflies, tapir, coatimundis and three kinds of monkeys.

Overnight near Rincon de la Vieja National Park. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Rincon de la Vieja National Park*

Known for its stunning diversity of flora and fauna, this national park is home to two volcanoes, the Rincon de la Vieja and the Santa Maria, as well as six different volcanic peaks and thirty two rivers and streams. The park has small geysers, bubbling mud pots and mineral hot springs that have earned it the name, "Costa Rica's Yellowstone". One more thing that is unique from Rincon de la Vieja Volcano is the Vrizea Vulcanicola bromeliad, endemic to this park and

Costa Rica.

We will have a full morning with a somewhat CHALLENGING walk (undulating, uneven terrain - talk to you Tour Leader re your suitability) along Las Pailas Trail to view the best volcanic activity you can see in the country. The trail takes us through cloud forest, open grassy slopes and near a wide array of volcanic features including impressive boiling mud pots, fumaroles and thermal streams.

This afternoon you can continue your on-foot exploration on your own or take part in a number of optional activities, including river tubing, horseback riding and / or hot springs soaking. Or you can simply relax and enjoy the birdsong and magnificent views.

Overnight near Rincon de la Vieja. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Rincon de la Vieja, Costa Rica - Granada, Nicaragua*

Today we continue north to Granada, Nicaragua (have your passports handy!).

Granada is set by Lake Nicaragua with views of volcanoes on Island Ometepe and is one of the most beautiful cities in Central America. Countless historical buildings share the city's cobblestone streets with elegant homes and tranquil parks, an urban elegance complemented by nearby natural attractions.

Overnight in Granada. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Granada: Walking Tour & Boat Trip*

We will visit the most interesting sites in this city, including the Fort La Polvora, the Xalteva Church, the Xaltera walls, and the church La Merced. We walk through the Main Square Colon and visit the Cathedral, the Casa de los Leones, and the old Convent of San Francisco where you can admire the impressive stone-carved statues with animal and human form.

There are 350 small emerald-green islands near Granada, all created when the Volcan Mombacho erupted and lava flew into the lake forming small islands. The area is now a haven for birdwatchers, with herons, ducks and cormorants. On our boat tour of the islands we include a visit to El Castillo San Pablo, a fortress built in 1784 to protect Granada from the British.

Overnight in Granada. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Granada - Managua: City Tour*

Today travel to Managua and have a city tour on arrival.

En route we stop at the Masaya Volcano National Park which comprises two volcanoes and five craters. The volcanoes have erupted several times in history, and were feared by both the indigenous people and the Spanish conquerors. The eruptions have had a dramatic impact on the surroundings. Rocks and volcanic ashes still cover the area surrounding the volcanoes. The nature is rough yet peaceful. Different types of vegetation appeared after the eruptions. Visitors can peek over the edge at the Masaya Volcano and look into the impressive crater, which is continuously emitting smoke and sulfur gases.

In Managua, we will visit historical sites such as the Old Cathedral, destroyed by the earthquake of 1972; the Presidential House, the National Palace of Culture, the waterfront and the National Museum.

Overnight in Managua. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Departure*

Departure from Managua.

BUEN VIAJE!