

Mario's Costa Rica Travel

Personalized travel throughout Costa Rica

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Enjoy all the natural beauty of Costa Rica with none of the hassles. Let us take you and your friends and family on day trips and excursions throughout the country in our air-conditioned mini-van, which carries up to fifteen passengers.

Travel at your own pace. Stop as often as you want to take photos, look for birds, or have a snack.

Your experienced driver and guide, Mario Pérez, knows all the back roads and hidden gems of this engaging, complex land. With his help you can visit popular destinations and still avoid the tourist traps, getting to know local favorites instead.

Arenal Volcano and Hot Springs

Thermal Relaxation and a Spectacular Nighttime Show

Costa Rica's most active volcano, Arenal's frequent—often hourly—eruptions are most impressive at night, when sparks shoot upward and red-hot lava slides down the cone. The perfect prelude is an afternoon spent relaxing at the Tabacón Hot Springs Resort: soaking in the thermal waters, splashing under natural waterfalls, and enjoying the excellent food.

Intrepid souls will want to include a two-hour hike on the volcano's lower slopes, where sharp-eyed observers will spot a great variety of birds flitting among the dense tropical vegetation.

In our mini-van you'll be free to enjoy the gorgeous views of mountains, valleys, and

lake on the trip northward, and to relax and savor the day's experience as you drive back after dark.

Carara Biological Reserve

Beaches and Tropical Wildlife

It's worth getting up early in order to reach the Pacific-coast Carara Biological Reserve while the day is young. A remarkable array of wild creatures—birds, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals—make their homes here.

Scarlet macaws, roseate spoonbills, crocodiles, iguanas, sloths, coatis, and white-faced monkeys abound in the reserve, and the naturally dispersed vegetation makes them easier to spot, with the help of a trained local guide.

Then head to one of the nearby beaches for the afternoon. We'll help you find the

“We loved exploring the Central Valley with Magnolia Tours. Mom wanted to see orchids, I was crazy about volcanoes and souvenirs. Mario helped us plan out trips that made the most of each of our days here. We met wonderful people wherever we went. I even learned a little Spanish!”

—Emily Donovan, corporate litigator. Boston, Mass.

perfect spot depending on whether you want to swim, sunbathe, body surf, people-watch, or a bit of each. Plan to spend a full day to get the most out of your Central Pacific excursion.

Cartago: The Enchanting East

Colonial Ruins, Elegant Orchids, and the Irazú Volcano

The eastern end of the Central Valley offers a perfect combination of historical sites, botanical gardens, and spectacular views. Eleven thousand feet high but easily accessible by road, the peak of the Irazú Volcano is a serene, almost lunar landscape, its crater stained an eerie lime green by volcanic minerals.

The Basilica of Nuestra Señora de los Angeles, in the center of Cartago, bears witness to the deep faith of generations of Costa Ricans in its impressive architecture and in the scores of promissory offerings, ranging from the humble to the exquisite, that pilgrims have placed at the shrine.

Just outside the city the Lankester Gardens boast over 800 varieties of orchids, while an enormous array of tropical shrubs and flowers adorn the beautiful grounds.

A short drive with breath-taking views brings you to the crumbling stone ruins of the church of Ujarrás, built in the 1680s. In the nearby village of Orosi, a restored colonial church adjoins a museum of religious art. Continue on to the town of Paraíso, where you can dine while enjoying spectacular vistas of the Reventazón Valley far below.

Guayabo National Monument

Pre-Colombian Ruins Glimpsed Through the Jungle Mists

Guayabo Monument captivates visitors with an intimacy and mystery long since erased from more well-known archaeological sites elsewhere in Central America. Once a settlement of over 20,000 people, the city was abandoned over a century before the Spaniards' arrival. Walking among the stone paths and circular house sites, as birds flit in and out of the dense surrounding jungle, you can imagine yourselves the first humans to discover this site after centuries of silence.

On the way back, stop at a farmhouse outside the small town of Juan Viñas for "el cafecito de la tarde" (afternoon coffee) prepared on a wood burning stove. Admire the owners' coffee fields, which spread across impossibly steep hillsides, and chew on a fresh-cut piece of sugar cane.

Plan a full day for this unforgettable trip.

Poás Volcano and Sarchí Crafts

Fumaroles and Elephant Ears

Poás Volcano is a study in visual contrasts. The cloud forest vegetation that surrounds the volcano is as lush as the vast crater (one of the largest in the world) is desolate. A short hike from the sulfurous crater brings you to the emerald green tranquillity of Botos Lagoon.

Continue on to visit the topiary gardens of Zarcero and the artisan center of Sarchí, where you can splurge on handcrafted souvenirs from gleaming wooden bowls to colorful miniature ox-carts.

Design a custom tour that's perfect for you! Contact us at mario@magnoliacloudforest.com or call (506) 225-7675 and ask for Mario.