



# Highlights of Central America: Costa Rica & Panama

12 days | 15 days with Cartagena extension

Experience the best of this vibrant region as you spot wildlife in the magical Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, sip flavorful Panamanian coffee at a local farm, and watch ships pass through the Panama Canal. Whether you're snapping photos of sloths in Costa Rica or strolling the historic streets of Panama City, the verdant landscapes and irresistible culture of these two nations will shine on this small group Wildlife Tour.



## Your tour package includes

- 11 nights in handpicked hotels
- 11 breakfasts
- 4 lunches
- 5 dinners, some with beer or wine
- 2 food tastings
- 9 sightseeing tours
- Expert Tour Director & local guides
- Private deluxe motor coach

## Included highlights

- Santa Elena Cloud Forest Reserve
- Heliconia Ranch tree planting
- Manuel Antonio National Park
- Gesha coffee tasting
- Chitré artisan workshops
- Gatun Lake cruise
- Miraflores Locks
- Casco Viejo
- Chagres National Park
- Emberá community visit

## Tour pace

On this guided tour, you'll walk for at least 2.5 hours daily across moderately uneven terrain, including paved roads, unpaved trails, and muddy paths, with some hills.

## Group size

12-22

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## San José → 1 night

### Day 1: Arrival in San José

*Included meals: light dinner*

Welcome to Costa Rica! Settle in to your hotel and enjoy an included dinner.

*Please note: Travelers arriving at the hotel late this evening will have an informal dinner.*

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## Monteverde → 2 nights

### Day 2: Transfer to Monteverde & hiking tour of Santa Elena Cloud Forest Reserve

*Included meals: breakfast, welcome lunch*

Leave the city behind and head to the mountainous town of Monteverde, where you'll sit down with your fellow travelers for a welcome lunch at a local, family-owned ranch. Join your Tour Director for an afternoon hike through Santa Elena Cloud Forest Reserve, a haven for birdwatchers.

- Learn about variety of flora and fauna, including orchids and ferns
- Walk through the misty forest as you explore this rare ecosystem, which gets its name from the constant cloud coverage
- Try to spot toucans, hummingbirds, resplendent quetzals, and more

*Please note: Travelers should be able to hike around two miles over wet, and potentially slippery, pathways.*

### Day 3: Heliconia Ranch

*Included meals: breakfast, lunch*

Learn about Costa Rica's diverse ecology and vibrant culture today.

- Help with reforestation efforts by planting a native tree at Heliconia Ranch
- Enjoy an included lunch as you watch traditional Costa Rican dances performed by children from the community

Spend a free afternoon in Monteverde or add an excursion.

+ Sky Walk

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## Manuel Antonio → 2 nights

### Day 4: Manuel Antonio National Park

*Included meals: breakfast, dinner*

Make your way south to the country's smallest national park, popular for its breathtaking beaches and scenic hiking trails. Uncover it's incredible biodiversity and postcard-worthy beaches on a guided tour.

- Keep an eye out for some of the 109 mammal species and 270 bird species that call the park home
- Walk to the top of rocky Cathedral Point to view the park from across the Pacific
- See the blowhole at Escondido Beach
- Survey the saw cliff and sea caves at Serrucho Point
- Relax on the beach or take a dip in the Pacific Ocean

Sit down for an included dinner this evening.

### Day 5: Tárcoles River cruise

*Included meals: breakfast*

Travel to the quiet town of Tárcoles and set out on a riverboat tour of the Tárcoles River led by a local guide.

- Soak in views of lush mangrove forests and jungle scenery
- Look out for wildlife such as crocodiles, iguanas, lizards, monkeys, and birds

Enjoy a free afternoon in Manuel Antonio or add an excursion.

+ Manuel Antonio Catamaran Cruise

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## Boquete → 2 nights

### Day 6: Transfer to Boquete

*Included meals: breakfast, dinner*

Cross the border into Panama today and meet up with your Panamanian Tour Director as you make your way to the town of Boquete, which is located in the mountains and known for its year-round temperate weather.

Then, enjoy an included dinner at a local restaurant this evening.

### Day 7: Coffee farm & factory tour

*Included meals: breakfast, tasting*

Spend a free morning in Boquete or add an excursion.

This afternoon, take a guided tour of a local coffee farm and factory to learn about the region's connection to the flavorful beverage.

- Explore the farm to learn about the process of growing and harvesting coffee beans
  - Walk through the factory to see how the beans are roasted
  - Sample award-winning Gesha coffee, a rare type of coffee made from beans that are only grown in a few countries across the globe
- + Cloud Forest Nature Walk & Bird Watching

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## Chitré Region → 1 night

### Day 8: Transfer to the Chitré Region & sightseeing tour of artisan workshops

*Included meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner*

Travel south to the Chitré Region to discover why this area is considered the cultural cradle of Panama. You'll take a guided tour after an included lunch to get to know four local craftspeople located in Chitré and the picturesque town of Parita.

- Meet a drum-maker and learn how the artisan creates this popular instrument as you enjoy a musical demonstration
- Step inside a pottery workshop to meet a potter who will demonstrate how to make ceramics in a handmade oven
- Visit a family of mask-makers to hear how they research and design the traditional Diablico Sucio masks
- Interact with a family of textile workers who specialize in creating polleras, colorful Latin American skirts, which can take years to complete
- See the colorful designs, as well as the threading and sewing techniques, as the artisans talk about the history and significance of the skirts

Enjoy an included dinner this evening.

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## Panama City → 3 nights

### Day 9: Transfer to Panama City, Panama Canal cruise & Miraflores Locks

*Included meals: breakfast*

Travel to Panama City and spend the day exploring the legendary Panama Canal —a feat of engineering.

- Board a covered boat in the town of Gamboa and float alongside commercial and private boats as you sail along Gatun Lake
- Learn about the manmade lake, which plays an essential role in helping ships pass through the Panama Canal
- Try to spot wildlife including Panamanian tamarins, green iguanas, crocodiles, and birds along the lake's jungle-lined shoreline

After your boat ride, head to the Miraflores Locks and enjoy exclusive access to one of the most important areas of the Panama Canal.

- Step inside the Miraflores Visitor Center to discover how the canal was built
- Stand within a few feet of incoming ships and watch as they cross through the locks

*Please note: On some departures the Miraflores Locks may be replaced with entrance to the Miraflores Museum due to closures.*

**Day 10: Sightseeing tour of Panama City**

*Included meals: breakfast, tasting*

Meet up with a local guide and spend some time exploring Panama's capital city.

- Pass the Frank Gehry-designed Biomuseo and view the city's modern architecture as you drive down Amador Causeway
- Take a walking tour of the UNESCO-listed Casco Viejo neighborhood
- Visit the Plaza de Francia, a memorial dedicated to the French laborers who lost their lives in the first failed attempt to dig the Panama Canal
- Visit Plaza de la Independencia to see where Panama declared independence from Colombia
- Step inside the Church of San Jose to marvel at the ornate Golden Altar and see the Metropolitan Cathedral
- Stop at shop to sample local chocolates and rum
- Walk through Parque De Santa Ana and past the historic La Avenida Central shopping street
- Learn about the culture in El Chorrillo neighborhood, which was bombed during the U.S. invasion of Panama in 1989
- Enjoy free time for lunch in the Casco Viejo neighborhood

Spend a free afternoon in Panama City or add an excursion.

+ Casco Viejo & Cinta Costera Bike Tour

**Day 11: Chagres National Park & Emberá**

**community visit**

*Included meals: breakfast, lunch, farewell dinner*

Leave Panama City behind and head into the lush rainforests of Chagres National Park.

- Board a traditional dugout canoe for a ride up the Chagres River, soaking in the jungle scenery as you go
- Head to a village where the indigenous Emberá people, known as the keepers of the rainforest, have lived for thousands of years
- Learn about the Emberá community and way of life, including lessons in traditional medicine and cultural dance
- See how their culture exists in harmony with the surrounding rainforest
- Enjoy an included lunch in the village before returning to Panama City

Head to a local restaurant and celebrate your trip during a farewell dinner with your fellow travelers.

**Flight Home**

**Day 12: Departure**

*Included meals: breakfast (excluding early morning departures)*

Transfer to the airport for your flight home or continue on to Cartagena, Colombia.

**+ Cartagena extension**

Fly to Cartagena, one of the Caribbean's most historic spots, to continue your adventure. You'll explore the UNESCO-listed city on a sightseeing tour, and even enjoy a little beach time while you're at it.

**Cartagena → 3 nights**

**Day 12: Flight to Cartagena**

*Included meals: breakfast*

Fly to Cartagena, Colombia today. Spend a free evening in the city or add an excursion.

+ Cartagena Cooking Class & Dinner

**Day 13: Sightseeing tour of Cartagena & dance class**

*Included meals: breakfast*

Set off on a walking tour to explore Cartagena's colorful and historic UNESCO-recognized Old Town alongside a local guide.

- Stroll through the beautiful Plaza de Bolívar as you learn about the park's connection to the fight for Colombian independence
- Tour the Inquisition Palace to see a variety of artifacts and exhibits that highlight the country's cultural heritage
- Visit San Felipe de Barajas Castle, a grand fortress built by the Spaniards that sits atop the Hill of San Lázaro

Enjoy a free afternoon in Cartagena or add an excursion.

This evening, take part in a class led by a local dancer to learn how to dance salsa and cumbia.

- Follow along as your instructor shows you how to properly perform signature salsa moves
- Move to the beat as you learn about the roots of cumbia, a local dance style created by enslaved Black and indigenous people

+ Boquilla Mangroves & Afro-Caribbean Drum Lesson

**Day 14: Free day in Cartagena**

*Included meals: breakfast, farewell dinner*

Spend a free day in Cartagena or add an excursion.

Celebrate your trip during a farewell dinner at a local restaurant this evening.

+ A Day on Isla Barú

**Flight Home**

**Day 15: Departure**

*Included meals: breakfast (excluding early morning departures)*

Board your flight home today.

# Customize your experience

Customize your tour by adding excursion options. Excursions offered on the same day will occur at different times, so there's no need to choose. Save \$10 when you book your excursion up to three days before your tour departs.\* Excursions requiring advance reservation only list this discounted price. Call or go online to customize your tour: [goaheadtours.ca/GTC](https://goaheadtours.ca/GTC) | 1-800-754-5066

## Day 3: Sky Walk

\$89CAD/\$99CAD\* (time length varies, departure time varies)

The canopy layer of the Costa Rican rainforest teems with life, but until recently, it was difficult for travelers to enter this world. On today's excursion, a guided tour brings you to a series of suspended bridges high above the floor of the Monteverde cloud forest.

## Day 5: Manual Antonio Catamaran Cruise

\$159CAD/\$169CAD\* (3 hours, departure time varies)

Spend the afternoon cruising along the central Pacific coast of Quepos on board the Ocean King catamaran, the largest in Central America. Sail through the various islands and rock formations as you explore Manuel Antonio National Park from the water, keeping an eye out for dolphins and sea birds that inhabit the area.

Snorkel in the calm turquoise waters as you explore the underwater beauty up close. Please note: This excursion is weather-dependent and will run in the afternoon from January to March and in the morning from April through mid-December.

## Day 7: Cloud Forest Nature Walk & Bird Watching

\$89CAD/\$99CAD\* (3 hours, departs in the morning)

On the outskirts of Volcán Barú National Park sits a stunning cloud forest that's home to a variety of flora and fauna. On today's excursion, you'll set out on a hike to explore this remote rainforest with a local guide. Walk along one of the park's well-maintained trails and stay on the lookout for rare local wildlife including the resplendent quetzal bird, sloths, and monkeys.

## Day 10: Casco Viejo & Cinta Costera Bike Tour

\$65CAD/\$75CAD\* (3 hours, departs in the afternoon)

Explore the historic district of Panama on a guided bike tour. Meet up with a local guide in the heart of Casco Viejo along the Simon Bolivar Plaza and embark on a three-hour bike ride. Ride past landmarks like Plaza Simon Bolivar, the Arco Chato, Plaza de Francia, La Bóvedas, and the local artisan mini market. Then, make your way to the waterfront and bike along Cinta Costera, taking in beautiful views of the ocean and city. Stop at a local market, and cool down with some ceviche and a refreshing drink before returning to your hotel.

## Extension excursion options

### Day 12: Cartagena Cooking Class & Dinner

\$169CAD/\$179CAD\* (4 hours, departs in the evening, dinner included)

Spend the evening at a restaurant enjoying a cooking demonstration to see how to make flavorful local foods followed by a delicious included dinner.

### Day 13: Boquilla Mangroves & Afro-Caribbean Drum Lesson

\$125CAD/\$135CAD\* (3 hours, departs in the

afternoon)

Start the day by visiting the fishing village of La Boquilla where you'll explore the lush mangroves by boat with a native guide. Board a traditional wooden canoe as a local guides you through the waterways. You'll see the variety of flora and fauna that flourish within the unique ecosystem. Then, disembark your canoe to enjoy an Afro-Caribbean music and drumming lesson on the beach near the fishing village. Afro-Caribbean music traces its roots back to West and Central Africa, having been brought to Latin America during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In Colombia, this music style often incorporates the celebratory rhythms found in Trinidadian Calypso and improvisational elements typical of Cuban descarga. You'll learn all about the music from the locals as you try your hand at recreating the upbeat tunes. After, travel back to Cartagena.

### Day 14: A Day on Isla Barú

\$205CAD/\$215CAD\* (10 hours, departs in the morning, lunch included)

Spend the day off the coast of Cartagena and explore Isla Barú, one of the country's most picturesque isles. Isla Barú is home to one of the most stunning white-sand beaches in Colombia and you'll enjoy a free day to relax on the shores of this tropical paradise. Snorkel and swim in the beautiful blue water, lounge on a hammock, or opt to purchase a massage treatment. Enjoy a lunch local coastal specialties. Please note: There are locker rooms and bathrooms on site, as well as a place to buy food and beverages.

\*Optional excursions may be purchased up to three days prior to departure or while on tour. Pre-purchased optional excursions cannot be canceled within three days prior to departure or while on tour. Select optional excursions require advance booking and cannot be purchased or canceled after the advanced reservation deadline. GAT accepts payment by cash, Visa or MasterCard for optional excursions purchased on tour. Additional fees may apply for optional excursions purchased on tour. Excursions require a minimum number of participants to operate. Details and prices are subject to change. Due to seasonal hours of operation and availability, some excursions may not operate. If this occurs, you will be refunded any payments made for that excursion post-tour. Learn more at [goaheadtours.ca/terms](https://goaheadtours.ca/terms)