

The Costa Rica Experience

Adventure and Eco-travel for Jewish Young Professionals the Pura Vida Way!

July 26 – August 4, 2019

The 9 day Costa Rica Experience for Young Jewish Professionals (for singles in their 20s - mid 40s) this summer offers a diverse adventure that combines the Volcanic Highlands of Costa Rica – with its breathtaking tropical beaches. It begins by visiting the capital San Jose and the local Jewish community, after which we visit Tortuguero National Park, with its majestic jungle canals and the late-night ritual of endangered turtle nesting on its beach; head down the Caribbean coast, with its tropical beaches, unique flora and fauna, active nightlife, and indigenous cultures; and end near the Arenal volcano where we will experience a chill Shabbat weekend zipling through the jungle, visiting the volcano, experiencing a serene eco-farm and soaking in some world famous hot springs!



Zipline adventure in the jungle!

This complete tour package provides a diverse and exciting adventure-experience brimming with activities (including chill time), all in a short but long week, and all in the beautiful and peaceful paradise called Costa Rica. It offers a mosaic for all your senses, focusing on the contrast between the highlands and the lowlands-coast. So come and spend an amazing week in the Costa Rican Caribbean and mountains!

We take the environment seriously, and plan our trips in accordance with the guidelines of eco-tourism: minimizing environmental damage through low impact travel, supporting local environmental projects and indigenous communities, and learning about the culture and natural environment of the places visited.

**Greener Travel
Sustainable Adventures**

As we say in Costa Rica, Pura Vida!

Trip itinerary

Please note that times of activities and locations might change due to unexpected circumstances. For example, inclement weather and hazardous road conditions might result in changes in the itinerary.

Arrival at the San Jose airport (SJO)

You will each be arriving at the airport at different times on Friday. You will be picked up by a driver that will take you to our hotel (Palma Real).

When you're deplaning have your passport ready and immigration card filled out. Once you get off the plane, you head for "migración." This might be a long line...

WELCOME!

- Go through the line and get your passport stamped.
- Go downstairs to retrieve your luggage (if you checked it).
- Grab your luggage and put it through the big X-ray machines and proceed outside
- Make sure you've kept your baggage claim stubs; they might ask you for them on your way out.

When you land you can exchange USD in the airport bank – or take out Colones in the ATM (about 570 Colones to one USD)

Also, if you want to have a local Tico (Costa Rican) cell number when you are in the county, remember to get the ICE (this is the name of the government phone company) GSM phone chip from the booth near the exit from customs. You can buy chips in \$5, \$10 or \$20. They might still have a deal where you can buy a phone for \$20- with \$20 prepaid credit – basically a free phone.

If you bring your own phone, you can use most any old and unlocked T-mobile or AT&T phone that uses the GSM technology. This will allow you to receive calls from the US, if you wish, and be in contact with me/others on the trip.

Please note: Our hotel in San Jose is right near a store when you can get a chip as well, so if you do not get one in the airport, you can get one during the weekend!

Transfer to hotel

We have arranged for you to be picked up by a shuttle service. Please follow these steps to get on your ride to the Palma Real hotel:

1. Upon arrival, you must go to the counter of TAXIS UNIDOS located near the airport exit doors. **It is important that you present yourself to the counter without leaving the airport.**
2. This counter operates between 6:30 a.m. at 9.30 p.m. Outside of these hours the service is not offered from the airport to the Hotel.
3. Transportation to the hotel is every 20 minutes and is only allowed with your confirmed reservation.
4. One suitcase plus a carry-on per person is allowed. Pets and additional bags cost \$ 5.00 (USD) each, to be paid directly to the driver.

If for any reason your flight is delayed/cancelled/late, please do all you can to let me know via my contact info (listed below) you can text my US cell, email me or call my local cell.

After pickup, you will be driven to the hotel, where the front desk will be expecting you. If I will be out, I will leave a note with reception about when I will be back – my guess is that, depending on when you arrive, you might want to rest up and maybe see some of the downtown of San Jose.

In any case, here is the hotel info where we will be staying Friday through Sunday:

Hotel Palma Real

(+506) 2290-5060

<http://www.hotelpalmareal.com>

200 Mts. North of ICE, Sabana Norte, San José de Costa Rica

Friday, July 26

The trip *officially* starts on Saturday, but all of you are arriving a day earlier and visiting San Jose and the Jewish Community!

After landing, you will be taken to our hotel, [Hotel Palma Real](#), where we will be staying the next two nights. You might have time to rest a bit and explore downtown San Jose (depending on when you land. UberX has arrived in San Jose – making it easy to get around!

This evening, we will be heading to services, Kabbalat Shabbat, and a communal dinner (oneg) at the [Congregación B'nei Israel](#), the liberal synagogue (affiliated with both the Reform and Conservative movements).



Congregación B'nei Israel San Jose

San Jose Shabbat times: Light Candles at: 5:43 pm - Shabbat Ends: 6:34 pm

We will leave the hotel at 5:30, and at 5:45 will meet with the president of the community, who will tell us a bit about the history of the community in San Jose.

We will also light candles – we will also take the time before Shabbat to get to know each other.

Services begin at 6:30, and we will be participating in a tri-lingual service – with a tri-lingual siddur unique to this community.

After services we will have an option to walk back to the hotel or take a shuttle (approx 30 min walking).

For our time in San Jose you will be staying in [Hotel Palma Real](#), conveniently located on the north side of [La Sabana Metropolitan Park](#), the largest urban park in Costa Rica. The hotel is 1.5 miles from downtown San Jose, and within walking distance from both synagogues we will be visiting. We will have access to the [Swimming pool](#) in the nearby Cristina hotel.



Saturday July 27

Morning option A: Shabbat services

This morning, those that wish to will head to Shabbat morning services at the impressive Modern Orthodox synagogue in San Jose, that is located in a complex that also hosts the headquarters of the local Jewish community (Mikva, religious school, kosher restaurant).

Services begin at 9:00, followed by a communal lunch.

After services you will return back to our hotel (walking distance for shomrei Shabbat – about 30 minutes).

For more info, please take this [virtual tour](#), and this [article from Haa'retz](#) for more info about the Jewish Community in Costa Rica.



Shaarei Zion synagogue in San Jose

Morning option B: Poas Volcano

Most of you have decided to go on the [Poás Volcano](#) tour this morning.

The Poas Volcano, a National Park, reaches to the height of 2,300 meters above sea level. It is an active volcano with a beautiful blue crater lake at its summit, located amidst alpine cloud forest. As we ascend, there is a noticeable change in temperature and vegetation, preparing us for the pleasure of the exuberant cloud forest of the Poas. At the Volcano we will have time to observe the impressive main active crater with its sulfur fumaroles and the second dormant crater.



The Poas Volcano Crater Lake

Time permitting you will visit a coffee estate, where your guide will explain a bit about the coffee crop, its cycle and its importance to Costa Rica. You might also decide to stop for lunch on the way back.

This will be your first time to meet our professional guide Luise Soto!

Pick up from hotel: 8:00 am. Return - about noon.

Cost: The cost for this trip will be \$25 per person, and includes: Entrance fee to the National Park, guide and transportation (tour usually costs \$65, but we are using our group tour guide, though need to cover entry and transportation)

Bring: comfortable walking shoes (tennis or hiking) and a windbreaker or light rain jacket.

Morning option C: Chillax

You can also decide to stay around the hotel, chill in the pool or walk to the Sabana Park, the largest urban park in Costa Rica, which is close to the hotel.

Afternoon:

We will all regroup at the hotel in the afternoon and decide on an hour for a San Jose walking tour – you might be able to catch a short Shabbat nap!

Lunch is on your own today, and depending on the activity you choose, you will either eat at the synagogue, near Poas or in one of the local places near the hotel.

Downtown San Jose tour

On the tour, we will be accompanied by Luis who will take us on a walk around Sabana Park towards downtown San Jose. It should be a nice Shabbat walk that will include an intro to Costa Rica (history, people, nature, geography)

Note: In case of rain, Luis will give us an introduction to Costa Rica in the one of the hotel's meeting rooms.



Downtown San Jose

This evening, after Havdallah, with the entire group present, we will all go out for dinner at [Paseo Gastronomico La Luz](#), downtown's Restaurant Row (Restaurant TBD). In the last few years, the city of San José has been creating a “restaurant row” close to Downtown. Costa Ricans know it as Paseo Gastronomico la Luz in Barrio Escalante.

We will be leaving the hotel for downtown at 6:45, and the bus will be returning to the hotel after dinner.

Depending on how you feel, you might want to check out the Latino vibe of the local nightlife, take in some drinks and maybe bust a salsa move.

For those interested, you will be able to check out a few bars, night and night spots in Bario Escalante and La California where many old mansions are now bars or restaurants (like the Antik club below). It is pretty easy to take an Uber or cab back to hotel from here.

Remember – take into consideration tomorrow we will be leaving at 7:30 am after checking out and eating breakfast!



Sunday, July 28

We will be saying goodbye to San Jose, and head after breakfast to the northern Caribbean coast. We will drive down from the central valley mountains to vast Caribbean lowlands. We will stop for a pit stop in [Guapiles](#), which serves as the country's gateway between the Caribbean coast and the central highlands.



Tortuguero national park

After this, we will head through small towns and villages that make their living mostly from banana and pineapple harvesting, arriving at the small dock of Pavona, where our boat will bring us to the tiny island village of Tortuguero. Along the way, our captain will give us an option to observe some of the wildlife that lives along the canal.

[Tortuguero](#) is both a national park, and a village, and there are no roads here – we will travel by boat on its many canals – that’s how locals get from place to place around here.

In Tortuguero we will check into to the [Rana Roja Lodge](#) surrounded by lush vegetation- and enjoy a welcome cocktail and lunch!

This lovely lodge has comfortable spacious rooms, with comfortable beds, private bathrooms, hot water, ceiling fans, and a turtle shaped swimming pool!

The beautiful main dining room with soaring ceilings provides first class meals in an atmosphere that reflects and compliments the jungle paradise surrounding it – this is where we will be eating all our meals!

After checking in we will have some chill time, enjoying the swimming pool!



Rana Roja Lodge, Tortuguero

Later in the afternoon, we will **visit the local village of Tortuguero**. There are no cars or streets and nature is literally bursting into town. On one side of the village, rivers and waterways beckon you to paddle deep into the jungle and experience nature unperturbed. On the other side of the village a Caribbean beach welcomes thousands of sea turtles to nest every year.

There is no guided activity here, only a chance to interact, shop, and experience this secluded Tico community. During this time you can also head to the beach and enjoy the Caribbean sands – but beware – no swimming allowed here. It is an unguarded beach with strong waves, so swimming is not recommended, not to mention stingrays, 15 foot crocodiles that enjoy entering into the salty waters and the occasional bull shark.

We will also pay a visit to the excellent [Sea Turtle Conservancy](#) museum for a short guided tour and movie.

Spa visit: There is a jungle style [spa the Aninga a lodge near where we will be staying](#) - it offers **many 2 for 1 specials**. They will pick you up from the lodge by boat –the reception at Rana Roja can help book the spa visit if you are interested. In the past, those interested in visiting the spa went their first, and then met the rest of the group during our village visit.

Relax in the lodge: A meal and relaxation await our return at the lodge. Tonight we can take advantage of all amenities of the lodge!

Night option- extremely recommended: Tonight you will have the option of taking a late night tour, to see the female green or Leatherback turtles, which come during this season to lay their eggs on the picturesque coast. This tour is not included in the package, and will cost extra (\$35 pp).



Monday, July 29

Today starts early - 5:30am!

This is a day of jungle exploration in the Tortuguero National Park.

Early Morning Canoe Tour: In the early hours of the morning you will be woken up by a loud noise. What you will hear is not a trumpet or a big bell, but a natural alarm called the Howler Monkey! Drink some coffee and get ready for a very early boat ride. This is the best time to find wildlife along the majestic canals while admiring the beauty that is the Tortuguero National Park. Among the common species of fauna to be found are the howler, white-faced Capuchon and Spider monkeys; crocodiles; iguanas; and the blue heron, aningas, kingfishers and other type of birds. If we look closely, we may see a manatee or the Gaspar fish (considered a living fossil).

The Tortuguero National Park is one of the most varied parks in Costa Rica. It boasts high rainforests, marshy lands, long stretches of beach, and wide open canals perfect for crocodile spotting. It is also one of the most important breeding grounds for the Green Sea Turtle. The wildlife here is rich and diverse with unusually large populations of monkeys, birds, and fish.

The beaches around Tortuguero are key nesting sites for many of the world's most endangered species of sea turtles. The small village, which can be reached only by boat or airplane, is sustained in large part by eco-tourism.

Moring: A breakfast buffet will be served upon our return. After breakfast it's time to check out and make our way to Arenal!

We will be heading out the same way we entered, with our bus waiting for us at the Pavonas docks. From here, we will head to the Arenal Volcano area, stopping for lunch at Guapiles (not included in price of trip).

After lunch, it's time to head southeast - to the Carribbean coast.

Time permitting, we might swing through the historic port of Limon.

***A bit of history:** The biggest city on Costa Rica's Caribbean coast, the birthplace of [United Fruit](#) and capital of Limón Province, this hard-working port city sits removed from the rest of the country. Cruise ships deposit dazed-looking passengers between October and May. Around here, business is measured by truckloads of fruit, not busloads of tourists.*

Christopher Columbus first dropped anchor in [Costa Rica](#) in 1502, just off the coast of Puerto Limón. The Atlantic coast, however, was left largely unexplored by Spanish settlers until the



19th century. In 1867, construction began on an ambitious railroad connecting the highlands to the sea. Limón was chosen as the site of a major port, which would facilitate exports of the coffee from the Central Valley.

The railroad project changed Costa Rica in dramatic ways. The freed Jamaican slaves that provided cheap labor for the railroad construction settled on the coast, introducing the English language and Caribbean culture to the previously homogeneous population. The bananas that were planted alongside the tracks as a cheap food source for the workers became the country's number-one export. And the American-owned United Fruit, which controlled the booming business, made Costa Rica a part of its banana empire.

In 1913 a banana blight shut down many Caribbean fincas, and much of the banana production moved to the Pacific coast. Afro-Caribbean workers, however, were restricted by visa regulations to Limón Province, so they were forbidden from following the employment opportunities. Stranded in the least-developed part of the country, many turned to subsistence farming, fishing or working on cocoa plantations. Others organized and staged bloody strikes against United Fruit.

In 1948 Limón provided key support to José Figueres during the 40-day civil war. In 1949 the new president enacted a constitution that finally granted blacks the right to work and travel freely throughout [Costa Rica](#).

Puerto Viejo

By afternoon, we will be arriving in Puerto Viejo on the Caribbean coast. **Puerto Viejo** is one of the most happening places in Costa Rica - a place where surfers, travelers, backpackers and the counter-culture crowd blend with the local Latino, Afro-Caribbean and Bribri indigenous cultures, with its pristine coastline acting as a backdrop. Find more information about the town here: www.puertoviejoweb.com.

Until recently Puerto Viejo has been an undiscovered jewel in Costa Rica that attracted mainly a backpacker and surfer crowd. The whole area is one huge melting pot of cultures. In addition to the foreigners which are mostly South American, Canadian and European; you have 3 distinct local cultures living here (Indigenous, Jamaican Caribbean and Spanish).

There are the BriBri natives who have lived here for centuries, the Jamaicans who initially came over as workers to build the railroad for the banana trade, and then Costa Ricans from Spanish descent. In 2002 there was a census done for the area and they found people from 49 different countries in a population of just over 2,000.

Today, in addition to miles and miles of unspoiled beaches and thousands of hectares of jungle, Puerto Viejo offers a huge selection of all types of restaurants, craft shops, tours, nightlife. And if you are looking for more adventure, we have a photo album highlighting the many things to do in the area.

We will be checking into [Selina Puerto Viejo](#). Here, jungle meets the ocean in perfect harmony. Selina is located right on the beach, 5 minutes' walk to the Playa Cocles beach. It offers a bar/restaurant (where we will eat breakfast), a swimming pool, beach seating, and yoga is on the rise, thanks to sessions with world-class instructors from Selina. jungle.

About Selina: *Selina is a different kind of lodging experience, redefined and created by a pair of Israeli entrepreneurs few years ago – with locations all around Latin America. Selina is a boutique hotel, co-living space, hostel (we will be staying in the hotel part, of course – in apartment and deluxe rooms). Selina is a hospitality network with all types of accommodation to fit the needs of every traveler. You name it, Selina has it. Communal rooms, suites, hammocks or camping areas for the more adventurous traveler. Suites for the more indulgent traveler. And our standard private rooms with communal areas for everyone in between. Read more about what [Selina is here](#).*

After arrival, we can take our first dip in the Caribbean, lounge in the hotel pool, and enjoy a sunset drink!

At about 6-7 pm we will be heading out to eat dinner at one of the many fine restaurants Puerto Viejo has to offer. Tonight is a free night, and you are free to choose where to eat – we will recommend some good options. Later, we can head to one of the bars and enjoy live Reggae music with mojitos, daiquiris or a fresh Pina Colada!

Our driver will take us into the village, and we will decide on a time he will take us back to the hotel – though you can stay out later and take a cab or tuk-tuk (5 minutes) back to the hotel!



Tuesday, July 30

Morning: Free time!

There is nothing planned for this morning, and you can choose from a few options: Rent bicycles and tour the beaches, take a surfing lesson, lounge in the pool or head a the highly recommended Jaguar Rescue!

Morning option: Cruiser bikes

Cruiser bikes are one of the best ways to get around the Caribbean (highly recommended)! Cruise down the road from Playa Negra towards Punta Uva, checking out the different beaches along the way. Bikes can be rented at or near the hotel for about \$5 for the day.



**On your next vacation you can go
on another "all-inclusive" cruise...**

**...or you can beach cruise,
Costa Rica style!**

It's your choice. www.costaribbean.com

Morning option: The Jaguar Rescue Center

The [Jaguar Animal Rescue Center](#) offers shelter, treatment and protection to ill or wounded wild animals in the South Caribbean area.

The Center is run by Sandro, an expert in poisonous snakes, and Encar, a biologist with a vast experience with looking after wild mammals in captivity.

Sandro and Encar started the Jaguar Center with the aim of saving the lives of as many animals that come in to the shelter, as well as trying to re-introduce them to their natural habitat, the forests of the South Caribbean.

Their house has become a sanctuary for wild animals and they try to accommodate their jungle guests as well as they can: terrariums for the snakes, large spaces for the Congo monkeys to rest in after spending the whole day playing in the garden's trees, special quarantine cages for the animals arriving seriously injured and also a large supply of medicine and an operating theatre for emergency surgery if necessary.

Your visit helps support the work of the centre!

Got Goat's Milk?

If you're visiting the center, you can help out by bringing with you to Costa Rica a can or two of [Meyenberg Powdered Goat's Milk](#) for the abandoned Howler Monkeys and Sloth babies at the center. They also need a product called [Bene-Bac](#) which is used for treating animals with intestinal problems. Unfortunately, neither of these products is available in Costa Rica.

Tour time is 9 am, and last 1.5 hours. Our driver will be able to take you there.

Entry is \$20.

We will be re-grouping at the hotel for lunch (included) and leave right after for our afternoon activity!



Tour participant with young howler monkey at the Jungle Rescue Center

Afternoon activity: BriBri, Chocolate Lady, Volio Waterfall

Approximate departure: 1:00

This afternoon we will be heading to the KèköLdi Indigenous Territory. This 5,000+ hectare reserve is part of the Talamanca-Caribbean Biological Corridor, more than 36,000 hectares of land under protection. KèköLdi is a mosaic of primary and secondary forests, abandoned cacao plantations and private farms. While there is no central “village” you’ll pass by traditionally built indigenous homes, bird-viewing towers, and more, and learn about Bribrí culture, history and use of the forest.



Our partner in organizing this visit is the Talamanca Association of Ecotourism and Conservation ([ATEC](#)), a non-for profit Greener Travel works with to benefit local communities.

About the BriBri

*Just 1.7 percent of the Costa Rican population is of Indigenous descent (about 70,000). The BriBri and Cabécar who live within the Talamanca are the most numerous Indigenous populations in Costa Rica. They live in three main reserves. The Talamanca-BriBri Reserve and the Talamanca-Cabécar Reserve cover large areas of the interior Talamanca Mountains, and the KèköLdi Reserve is smaller and just inland from Puerto Viejo. These reserves were created in 1977 following the adoption of the Indigenous Act by the Costa Rican government, giving the country’s Indigenous people the right to live within self-governed communities. However, the government retains the land titles to these territories. In the Talamanca forests, Indigenous people found palm trees (*Iriartea gigantea*, *Socratea durissima*) whose outer bark provided the building material for their houses; palm leaves (*Geonoma cuniatia*, *Raphia sp*) to weave thatched roofs; and sturdy vines (*Anthurium scandens* Aubl) that substituted for nails in construction. Many Indigenous people continue to live in thatch-roofed houses built entirely from forest products. Through secret ceremonies passed down through the generations, Indigenous shamans cure illnesses, employing medicinal plants and sacred.*

We will be taken through the Striut trail (Cacao in BriBri) in the tropical forest and learn from our guide about the importance of different species of flora and fauna for his

ancestors and those still used today by the locals. Your guide will tell you interesting mythological stories from the Bribri culture and the special connection of the people with the nature that surrounds them.

Chocolate Lady

Next we will visit an indigenous family where they make chocolate from the Cacao trees growing beside their house. You will learn and see demonstrated the process by which the cacao fruit is transformed into delicious and unique chocolate - which you will of course get to taste! You will have an opportunity to purchase some chocolate or other indigenous made handicrafts here (this is actually a good place to buy souvenirs and gifts, as it supports the local community directly. Note that part of the family speaks very limited English so if you don't speak Spanish your explanation of the process may take the form of a pantomime!



Traditional chocolate making at the BriBri reservation

Volio Waterfall

Next, we get to visit the Volio waterfall, a 12m high waterfall in the Talamanca Mountains, where you can swim if you like. Should this waterfall be too dry, we will take you to another waterfall in the area where you can enjoy swimming in the pristine nature pools.

Note: Your feet might get wet while exploring the waterfall, so make sure to wear appropriate shoes or bring an extra pair for changing after the hike!



After some chill time at the hotel, at about 6 pm, it is time to learn to prepare our dinner – Caribbean style: We will take a Caribbean cooking lesson, kosher style – i.e. fish and veggies!

Using fruits and veggies typical to Coastal Talamanca, you'll learn to cook in the traditional Caribbean way, such as patacones, batidos, or fish in Caribbean sauce, etc.

Our host is Junior Palmar, not only an awesome local guide, but also the son one of Puerto Viejo's most famous and favorite cooks, miss Lidia. He invites you into his home. Mind now, Juni isn't a professional culinary instructor but this is real local flavor! Get to know a community's food and you can learn a lot about their culture. Practice your patois (or your Spanish) and learn some recipes you can take home with you, a taste of the Caribbean.

Special Hints: Bring a pen and notebook to jot down recipes. Juni speaks the local dialect of English—a bit different from North American or European English



At night we are free to explore the town– all while taking in the special and laid back ambiance of Puerto Viejo. Later, we may hit one of the bars, clubs, or live music venues that dot the town...

Wednesday, July 31

After breakfast, this morning will take us on a half day hike in the amazing [Gandoca Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge](#) – one of the best trips for wildlife viewing in Costa Rica!

We will be picked up from our hotel at 7:30 am, after breakfast.

The hike will take us on some of the Refuge's inner trails, or to explore the bluffs and tiny hidden beaches along the coast. It will include a walk through the primary rainforest to encounter many of its colorful inhabitants and exquisite bird watching with the local naturalist, Tino. This tour is provided by [ATEC](#), a local nonprofit that helps promote culturally and ecologically sound tourism and small-scale, locally owned and responsible businesses in the area.



Hiking the Gandoca-Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge



After the walk we can lunch at [Maxi's Restaurant](#), considered by many to be the best seafood restaurant in the Caribbean (with many veggie friendly options! Before the hike you will choose from the Caribbean menu with rice and beans, patacones, salad, Caribbean sauce, and a type of protein: fish filet, chicken, veggie grill, steak with onions or red snapper – this way lunch will wait for us when we get out of the jungle!

After lunch, we can stay to enjoy the breathtaking and tranquil beaches of Manzanillo (to soothe our bodies from all that hiking!), or head back to the hotel for pool/beach there.

For those interested, snorkeling is available in some of the best tropical reefs this coast has to offer – with the local [Aquamor Marine Adventure Center](#).

Another option would be to enjoy a late afternoon swim along the magnificent **Punta Uva beach** south of the hotel- thought by many as the most beautiful beach in Costa Rica!



We will return to the hotel to chill a bit, and for dinner, we will head to the Israeli owned [Pita Bonita](#) restaurant, where Eilon will be serving some of the best Hummus outside of the Holy Land!

This dinner is included in the trip!

ברוכים הבאים!



Thursday, August 1

Whitewater Rafting Adventure!

Pickup from hotel: 6:00 am

Today we will be picked up early in the morning to go on a [whitewater rafting adventure](#) down the Pacuare River, known as one of the top five rafting rivers in the world for its scenery and rapids (Class III-IV). We will be traveling to the Caribbean Highlands, where the trip begins – the run is 18 miles long, taking 3-1/2 to 5 hours - depending on water level.



Tour participants rafting on the Pacuare River – what an experience!

We will arrive at the Exploradores Outdoors Operations Center for a delicious, typical Costa Rican breakfast. After breakfast and changing into rafting gear, we will drive to our private rafting put-in on the banks of the Pacuare River.

Here we review and adjust all necessary equipment for proper fit, give you a comprehensive rafting safety talk, and instruct you on paddling basics. From here, you and will launch your raft and begin to paddle 19 miles deep into the heart of one of Costa Rica's most impressive primary rainforests. You'll pass through densely vegetated rainforest gorges, view cascading waterfalls, relax in serene pools and experience pounding rapids. You will enjoy an adrenaline-packed afternoon running the Pacuare's biggest rapids: Upper and Lower Huacas, Cimarron, Dos Montañas and more. Wildlife is abundant, with sloth, toucans, parrots, coatis, morpho butterflies and colorful frogs being common sights.

From the take-out, it's a short drive back to the Operations Center for a hearty and delicious lunch, hot showers, optional drinks and a handy souvenir store.

You will be able to leave your bags in the company's Explorations Center (or on our bus) during the rafting adventure. You will be getting a thorough safety instruction before you enter the water.

In late afternoon, we will be arriving at the [Baldi Hot Springs](#) where we will experience one of the world's most amazing offerings. Here you will relax in Mother Nature's enormous hot tub. The hot springs are fed by an underground river heated naturally by the Arenal Volcano to the perfect temperature of 101 degrees. You will spend the later part of the day here, enjoying all that Baldi has to offer – a great way to relax after our long and adventurous week. After soaking until we look like prunes, we will enjoy an extensive buffet dinner!



Tonight, we will be checking into our home for the next 3 nights: [Rancho Margot](#)

Located along the shores of Lake Arenal, Rancho Margot is a family-owned sustainable tourism lodge (founded by Jewish Chilean Juan Sostheim in 2004). This lodge is close to some of the rivers and streams flowing through the property and right at the foothills of the Children Eternal Rain Forest, one of Costa Rica's most famous conservation projects. The Sostheim family is working hard to develop the awareness of sustainable living and self-sufficient tourism projects in Costa Rica. Surrounded by a verdant rainforest landscape, nestled on the Lake Arenal shores and the beautiful Cano Negro River Valley, this lodge is also known for its educational, wellness focused and adventure recreational activities.

The facilities are designed to give you an ideal space to relax, enjoy and disconnect with the stress of city life. We offer you a complete and personalized experience, and all our deals enable you to reconnect with the beauty of nature. Rancho Margot, spanning more than 400 acres, also features on site nature trails, medicinal plant gardens, two natural rock pools that are fed with pure spring waters and an outdoor playground replete with swings, slides and a teeter-totter.

In Rancho Margot we will be staying in deluxe bungalows set among the green hills. Each of the bungalows is designed with handcrafted furniture made with eco-friendly materials. All the bungalows are featured with private bath, two queen beds or a single queen bed and a couple of single and relaxing hammocks. There are private terraces from where you can enjoy neat vistas of the pristine natural surroundings. You can also enjoy listening to the calls of howler monkeys, which are frequent visitors to the property.



Natural pools

Built with river rocks and filled with pure, untreated crystalline water from natural springs that cascade from the mountain, we have two spring-fed cold pools, one with a vanishing edge and view towards the sky and a towering mountain of primary forest. The adjacent warm pool sits beneath a tree-shaped roof with a tree-trunk sculpture at its center. The pool is heated with excess energy production, when available.



Common areas

We want you and your family to feel at ease. As a guest, you can make use of all our facilities, including our community library, comfortable reception area, gardens, bar and restaurant, toucan lounge, wifi center, playground, yoga studio, soccer field and more.



Bar and restaurant

Simplicity and sustainability define the cuisine philosophy at Rancho Margot. Food is grown, harvested, and prepared here by hand. Some extra additions are sourced locally within the small community.

The bar is the center of Rancho Margot's evening life. Guests gather in wooden booths and saddle up to the well-stocked bar. The cozy atmosphere attracts both guests and local residents, creating an opportunity for great conversation as well as dancing!

Friday, August 2

Morning activity: Zipline canopy adventure!

After a scrumptious breakfast, it's time to head for the canopy!

If you like to experience a unique adrenalin filled sensation, come travel with us on one of the attractions that make Costa Rica famous at a worldwide level!

Arenal Ecoglide Park is one of Costa Rica's newest adventure parks. Its canopy is built following the highest standards, approved by I.C.T. (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo) and insured by I.N.S. (Instituto Nacional de Seguros) providing major security to its customers.

Arenal Ecoglide Park is known for having two separate cables, the first cable is the one you glide on, the second is for major safety precautions. The canopy consists of 13 cables and 15 platforms which are divided into three sections that are found mostly in the trees, which are designed to provide our visitors greater contact with nature.

The canopy tour not only offers you a great adventure but also an opportunity to observe all the animal life in its natural habitat. Each platform has been designed so that you can observe the forest from different angles allowing you to photograph the impressive scenery.

The first section has 8 cables and 9 platforms, with lengths from 10 to 110 meters.

The second section has 5 cables and 6 platforms, with lengths from 100 meters up to 430 meters. At the end of this section you will find the Tarzan Swing

Lunch: After the zipline activity, we will all go to La Fortuna, the town that is the center of the Arenal Volcano region for lunch. Lunch is on our own, and not included – there are many good options around here!



This afternoon, after returning to Rancho Margot it is time to rest up a bit or chill by the pools a and prepare for Shabbat.

Tonight we will enjoy an excellent organic Shabbat dinner!

Saturday, August 3

Today is Shabbat, and you will have options to rest and laze around the farm, chill by the pool, or take a walk around the area!

This morning, we will be offering a fascinating tour of the [sustainable farm](#).

The tour will be followed by some chill time - to relax in the pools, nap, read or practice some yoga.



Lunch will be taken poolside in the amazing [restaurant](#) , all organic and locally produced!

Afternoon option: Time to put on your rubber boots, and head on one of the trails heading into the 50,000 acre Children's Eternal Rainforest for a shabbat walk in the jungle!

Tonight we will gather under the stars for Havdallah, and enjoy our last evening surrounded by the magnificent rainforest!

If some of us are in the mood for it, a guided night hike of the surrounding rainforest is offered to discover its unique nocturnal denizens.

Sunday, August 4

Time to say goodbye!

We will leave the farm by 6:00 am, in time to make our flights back home (we need to be at airport two hours in advance) – the first flight of the group is at 11:30am, while those with later flights will have a few more hours to say goodbye!

Option for Saturday afternoon: Arenal Volcano Hike

This excursion is not included in the tour, and those choosing to go have to cover the entry fee of \$15 pp. This hike will most likely be during the same time as our morning or afternoon activities. It is not intended for those that are shomer shabbat.

Description of the hike: Before the active period of 1968, a lavish canopy of vegetation covered the Arenal Volcano. People that climbed Arenal's summit related that inside the crater there were big trees and at night, they slept in places where there was some heat due to small steam outlets. Right now the green area is located at the east side of the Mountain, and other little green parts can be seen on the north and the south of the volcano. Enjoy the most extraordinary view of the Arenal Volcano on a gentle Hike along the base of this marvelous

"Mountain of Fire". The Hike begins in one the trails close to the volcano, this trail will take us through the forest over recent lava flows and the area destroyed in 1968 now in the process of regeneration. We are going to be on this trail for about 2 ½ hours.

Recommendations for the hike: light clothes, hiking shoes, sun lotion, repellent, camera, binoculars and raincoat.



Arenal Volcano

Practical Details

Guides

For your Costa Rica Experience, Greener Travel will provide you with an experienced group leader that will escort you for the length of your trip (Director Ami Greener), as well as a local Tico guide (Luis Diego Soto). In various activities, we use the best local specialty guides with years of expertise in introducing tourists to the natural beauty of Costa Rica. We work mostly with local guides as well as with tourism non-profit organizations such as [ATEC](#), which make sure that the local indigenous communities benefit from tourism revenues while protecting the environment and the traditional way of life.

Transportation

We provide all transfers during the week using an air-conditioned Toyota Coaster minibus, as well as comfortable boat transfers in Tortuguero.

Entry Requirements

A valid passport is required for all visitors to Costa Rica. Airlines traveling to Costa Rica require a **passport valid for at least 6 months after the initial flight date** in order to board the flight. US and Canadian citizens do not need a tourist visa to enter the country. Visitors from all other nationalities should check with the Costa Rican Embassy.

Weather

Weather on the trips should be warm and comfortable. San Jose is 75 -85 f during the day, though it cools off a *bit* at night. The coast should be a bit hotter. It is Costa Rica, and it can rain, so **please bring a poncho or a light and breathable rain coat.**

Health Concerns

No immunizations, shots, inoculations or vaccinations are required to enter Costa Rica.

Electricity

Costa Rica has the same electric system as the United States. Electric outlets are 120 volts / 60 Hz.

Water

Drinking tap water is safe in Costa Rica, though the water on the coast (Caribbean) has an aftertaste and visitors tend to buy bottled water. We suggest you purchase a big water jug when you reach the coast (1 gallon) and use it to refill a smaller bottle – it saves money and is better for the environment. The places where we will be staying can provide fridges where you will be able to chill your water and store food.

Currency

The Costa Rican currency is the colón (cólores in plural), and the exchange rate is about 570 to one USD. You can change dollars at the airport, or just use a bank/credit card and withdraw money at the airport. ATMs can be found all over Costa Rica. Keep in mind that there is a few dollars fee for international withdrawals, though from experience it could be safer to travel with a bank card than with a large sum of cash that can get lost/stolen. The hotels you will be staying in will have safes where we can leave valuables and passports during the day.

Packing + laundry: please pack light!

I was reminded by the bus driver and especially the river boat captain to ask you to pack light, as the boats really have limited space. As noted, we will have access to laundry during the trip, and will do a group laundry in Puerto Viejo (for a small additional cost per kg).

Phones / communications / wi-fi during the trip

Phones: most US phones (specifically ATT + T-Mobile that use GSM) will have reception in Costa Rica, though **calls on roaming will be expensive** – but you will still be able to use them to text. You can also contact your provider about a specific roaming plan. T-Mobile has unlimited data as long as you stay with your plans limit (3GB, 5GB etc.) It is 2G or 3G instead of 4g abroad, but is great for travelers. Also, with T-mobile calls to US (and all other international calls) are now 20 cents a minute, and text to US phones are free!

If you want to have a local cell number, you can get a GSM phone chip from the ICE booth near the exit from customs when you land (ICE is Costa Rica's phone and electric company). You can buy chips in \$5, \$10 or \$20. You can use most any old and unlocked T-mobile or AT&T phone that uses the GSM technology. This will allow you to receive and make local calls and calls to the US (at a far cheaper rate than using your US phone on roaming). **The Costa Rica country code is 506.**

I will have two local phones during the trip, one will be for me, and the other for group use for local calls / emergency, as well as for times we split up and need to stay in communication.

Smartphones: You can also purchase a data sim from the ICE booth at the airport for a Smartphone (phone needs to be GSM able and unlocked). Some blackberries (usually ATT & T-Mobile) work in Costa Rica with no need to buy a sim, but please check with your providers about paying in advance for international email coverage (about \$5 per week).

Wifi: Most if not all the places we will stay in have wi-fi (at least in public areas), so you would be able to connect via most Smartphones. I would not advise to bring an expensive tablet or laptop on the trip (though for logistical purposes I will be bringing a netbook)

Contact throughout the trip:

Ami Greener Costa Rica cell: (506) - 8895-5838. I will have a local cell with me in Costa Rica during the entire trip – I will be turning my phone on when I arrive on Wednesday, August 3rd. You can give this phone number as an emergency contact for family/friends.

Ami Greener US cell: +1-646-469-9743 This number will be on as well, to use for texting from US phones – best way to contact me in case of flight delay/emergency. You can also add this number on WhatsApp.

Ami Greener Smartphone: best way to keep in touch from the US – my trusted Galaxy will be in roaming mode in Costa Rica, so I can see and reply to emails you send.