

# Costa rica trip report

September 2022 – klil and assaf zaitlin



Costa Rica is a small yet incredible country, and I would highly recommend visiting it if you love animals and nature. We traveled a big part of the country between September 23<sup>rd</sup> and October 16<sup>th</sup>. Even though it was the rainy season the weather was pretty much fine most days and we had a good amount (for a family trip) of 21 mammal species and 414 bird species. Our route included Tapirus, Tortoguero, Trimbina, Arenal, Rio Celeste, Manuel Antonio, Marino Ballena and San Gerardo De Dota. During this trip report I will mark **mammals** in red, **birds** in blue and **reptiles+amphibians** in green. For further information contact me via email – [killzait@gmail.com](mailto:killzait@gmail.com)

## Tapirus

Tapirus is a small and not very touristic lodge that holds a big private reserve West of San Jose. We



stayed there for one night and had a fabulous experience. The trails of this private reserve are full of birds and butterflies, and it is probably the best area for butterflies we visited – including lots of morpho butterflies. The reception area was teeming with good birds including yellow-throated toucan, collared aracari, king vulture, crowned woodnymph, shining honeycreeper and golden-hooded tanager. the only daytime mammal was a cute red-brocket deer.



But the highlight of the day was after the sun went down... we sat for dinner in the small restaurant of the lodge. We were the only guests and suddenly one of the workers came and asked us if we want to see a tapir. We ran quietly and excited with him on the trail until we bumped into a huge and apathic baird's tapir. It was an amazing sighting but still not the best of the evening... after we returned to the restaurant when the waiter came to bring us the food he was followed by another tapir! The waiter was trying to get rid of him, but we signed him to let him stay. The tapir was curious and started to smell our camera and even Assaf's shirt. We were all so shocked we could not stop laughing. After a minute the tapir turned around and walked back into the forest. Until today it is still the most exciting and unpredictable wildlife encounter I have had. After that we had another few sightings on the two tapirs both in the night and in the morning. The reception area also had a few red-eyed tree frogs.



## Tortuguero

Tortuguero is a very popular destination for tourists but not an obvious destination for naturalists. It is mostly known for its sea turtles' observations but offers much more than that. The boat leading from La Pavona to our hotel – Tortuga Lodge provided us with good **crocodile** and **basilisk** observations and a few birds like **wood stork** and **tricolored heron**.

The hotel grounds were very good for wildlife, The trees near the cabins were home to **mantled howlers** and **jeoffroy's spider monkeys**, the banks of the river were full of lazy **iguanas** and **basilisks** and the trees and water produced many colorful birds including **bare-throated tiger-heron**, **keel-billed toucan**, **great green macaw**, **slaty-tailed trogon** and **pale-billed woodpecker**.

In the afternoons we went to the beach and had a few observations of hatching **sea turtles** and some nice sea birds including **lesser frigatebird**, **brown pelicans** and **willets**. The trails of the Tortuga Lodge Private Reserve are barely worth mentioning and the only thing we found was a good amount of **strawberry poison dart frogs**.

During a night stroll in the hotel, we saw a few **racoons** and a **derby's wooly opossum**. The canals of the Tortuguero Nature Reserve weren't a big highlight and added the **capuchin monkey** and a few birds like the **belted kingfisher** and **northern jacana**.



## Trimbina



Trimbina is a lodge with a very big private reserve and a lot of wildlife. The grounds of the hotel produced something good in every hour of the day. [keel-billed](#) and [yellow-throated toucans](#) were numerous in the entrance, [scarlet macaws](#) passed above occasionally, and [green honeycreepers](#) were very common. In the late morning the frogs came out and lots of [green and black](#) and [strawberry poison dart frogs](#) jumped around the cabins.



It was also a great place to find sloths and we found 4 different [three toed sloths](#). The night tour was great, and we found a [two-toed sloth](#) above the hanging bridge, [nine-banded armadillo](#) in the reserve and a few interesting Reptiles including a [helmeted iguana](#) and a huge [boa constrictor](#) close to the lodge's restaurant! In the morning, we saw a [rufous motmot](#), a [black-throated trogon](#) and a [crimson-collared tanager](#) in the reserve.



## La Fortuna

The La Fortuna area is very touristic but hides a few hidden gems within it. One of them is the Bogarin Trail. It was a very easy spot for both **three-toed sloth** and **two-toed sloth**, **agoutis** and one of the guides we met there said that he occasionally saw ocelot and tamandua in the night tours, we couldn't arrange one and check this. It was also a fabulous place for birds with species seen including **black-and-white owl**, **fascinated antshrike**, **broad-billed motmot**, **green honeycreeper** and **red-legged honeycreeper**. Another site that was interesting (mostly for birds) is the Arenal



Observatory Lodge. Mammals seen are **coatis** and **agoutis**. Interesting birds seen along the trails include **spotted antbird**, **ocellated antbird**, **bicolored antbird**, **black-crested coquette** and **laughing falcon**. Our hotel (Los Lagos) was great but not for wildlife, we did see a few **red-eyed tree frogs** and an occasional **white hawk** and a few other nice birds.



## Rio Celeste

Rio Celeste is a beautiful area and reserve. The guides we met told us it is a good area for tapirs, but we saw no mammals except for **agoutis**. Our hotel - Rio Celeste Hideaway, was good for **red-eyed tree frogs** and for songbirds such as **blue dacnis**, **black and yellow tanager**, **emerald tanager** and **hepatic tanager**. the reserve was a bit crowded, and the birds were mostly shy, but we managed to find both **broad-billed motmot** and **keel-billed motmot**.

## Monteverde



Monteverde was a dream come true for us. Exciting animals were just about everywhere, and the views of the cloud forest were wonderful. We stayed at the Senda Hotel in Santa Elena which was wonderful. There were a few trails going through the forest and an access to the small but productive Agouti Reserve. The hotel grounds had lots of **variegated squirrels** and a few observations on **deppe's squirrel**. **agoutis** and **coatis** were numerous. The Agouti Reserve provided



all the species mentioned above and some very good observations on **collared peccaries** and **capuchins**. Good birds around the hotel were lots of **blue-crowned motmots** and a few **orange-bellied trogons** and **emerald toucanets**.



The Monteverde Reserve was beautiful but it was hard to find animals. We had some good birds there including two **sunbitterns** in a stream seen from the access road to the reserve. The Café Colibri in the entrance was fabulous for many Colibri species including the beautiful **Violet Saberwing**. The Curi Cancha reserve was beautiful with lower numbers of people and higher numbers of animals. We had very close encounters with **peccaries**, **coatis**, **agoutis**, **squirrels**, **capuchins** and **howlers**. of course, this reserve is more famous for its birdwatching, and we managed to find **red-**



**headed barbet**, **spangle-cheeked tanager**, **silver-throated tanager** and many others.



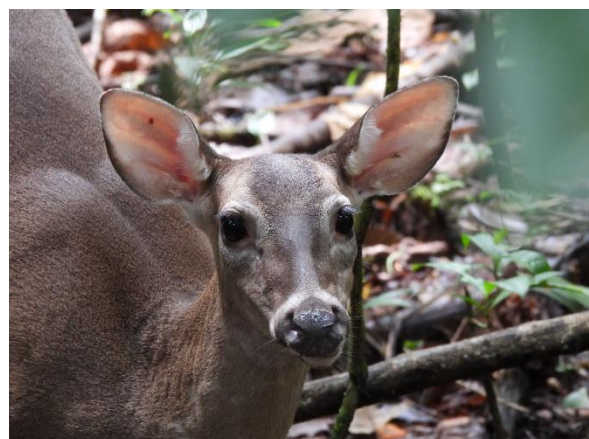
We took a night tour in El Refugio with a guide. The guides had a connection between them so if someone found something interesting everyone came to see it. This experience was weird, it felt a bit like the animals were staged and the guides came back to the same spots to find the same individuals every night. Anyway, the night tour was good after all. We found by ourselves a **kinkajou** on top of the canopy and a beautiful **side striped palm pit viper**. Other finds of the guides and other groups were a small **eyelash palm pit viper**, two species of **sloths**, **keel-billed toucan** and the **monteverde moss salamander**.



## Manuel Antonio



I didn't really like Manuel Antonio, it was very crowded and touristic, and the guides tried very aggressively to convince us taking a guiding which seemed to us unnecessary in this reserve. We were on our own and we could easily find the common mammals of the area. **three-toed sloths** were numerous with 4 different individuals and one **two-toed sloth** seen as well. **racoons** and **capuchins** were also common. The best mammals of the day were a group of **panamian Wwhite tailed deers**. We heard from one of the guides that if you come early in the morning, you have a chance to find silky anteater and tamandua. We also saw a few nice birds including **black-hooded Aantshrike**, **chestnut-backed antbird** and **dusky antbird**.



Our hotel, the Parador Resort was excellent for wildlife. It was the best spot we have been to for **scarlet macaws** and **fiery-billed aracaris**, they were all over the place in the early mornings flying loudly between the high trees. The trees around the pool were very good for both species of **sloths** and **squirrel monkeys** that we didn't manage to find anywhere else (even though they are supposed to be common). The sea observation was beautiful and produced annual observations of **roseate spoonbill**, **white ibis**, **magnificent frigatebird** and **brown booby**. The shallow pool also had a pair of **bull frogs** swimming inside during the nights.



## Marino Ballena

Most tourists don't visit this wonderful reserve which is a very reliable spot for whale watching most of the year (January-April, July-November). We spent here only one day and had a wonderful whale tour. We watched a mother **humpback whale** and her calf for a long time. The guides had a very high awareness for nature conservation and the whales were never interrupted, yet the boat is very small and allows a close observation unlike many other places in the world. We also saw some close distance jumping **common bottlenose dolphins** and 2 big **green sea turtles**. The whale tour office (Dolphin Tour) had a cute **raccoon** sitting on a palm tree in the backyard.



## San Gerardo De Dota

San Gerardo De Dota was an unplanned addition to the trip, and it is a magical place. This tiny village sitting in a small valley in the mountains is home to some of the most beautiful birds in the world. The only mammal we saw here is the **red-tailed squirrel**, but we heard from our guide that cameras in the mountains around revealed a mysterious incredible wildlife world including Jaguars, Ocelots, Coyotes and Pumas. We took a birdwatching guide that led us to a secret tree where we saw a few different **quetzals**! After that we continued to the cloud forest above the village where we saw

**bare-shanked screech owl, golden-browed chlorophonia, flame-throated warbler, spangle-cheeked tanager** and other unique species. Around the Savegre Hotel we saw many beautiful species of **hummingbirds, flame-colored tanager, silver-throated tanager, emerald toucanet** and many more.





