

No Artificial Ingredients - Costa Rica

For a perfect blend of science, adventure, and hands-on learning, Costa Rica is an excellent destination for student group travelers. A republic in Central America, Costa Rica (literally "Rich Coast") is bordered by Nicaragua, Panama, the Pacific Ocean, and the Caribbean Sea. The destination is divided into 20 natural parks, eight biological reserves, and a series of protected areas that will expand the regular science curriculum far beyond the walls of the classroom.

Outdoor activities include horseback riding, hiking, and guided bird-watching tours. While Costa Rica has only about 0.1% of the world's landmass, it contains 5% of the world's biodiversity, with nearly a quarter of the country composed of protected forests and reserves.

The internationally-known Corcovado National Park is famous among ecologists for its biodiversity and is home to an abundance of wildlife. Students experience the park with horseback riding, expeditions to the Guayami Indigenous Reserve, and bird watching. Boat tours provide views of marine birds and dolphins. Corcovado is the last remaining large tract of lowland rain forest on the Pacific coast of Central America. Howler and spider monkeys, tapirs, anteaters, crocodiles, bull sharks, and exotic birds are just a few of the park's inhabitants, along with a huge variety of tropical plant life.

Home to 320 species of birds, Tortuguero National Park is mostly recognized for its annual nesting of endangered green turtles and is considered the most important nesting site for this species. The park is also home to spider, howler, and white-throated Capuchin monkeys, the three-toed sloth, and the endangered manatee. The best way to see most of the park is from a boat. Evening guided tours enable students to visit the beachfront and see the Green Sea turtles nesting under the moon. During the tours, students can watch as the turtles struggle up the beach, dig their nests, and lay their eggs.

A walk through a Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve reveals a lush green garden of mosses, ferns, and flowers growing thickly on every tree. Clouds drift and settle among the slopes, providing moisture for the amazing plant growth. Wildlife includes the jaguar, three-wattled bellbird, and the famous and elusive Resplendent Quetzal. Of the 1,400 types of Costa Rica Orchids, 500 of them are found at the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve.

Students may enjoy a canopy tour of a cloud forest's protected area, or explore the area by suspension bridges. Aerial tram tours travel through the treetops, where an incredible diversity of plants and animals can be seen. For a more rustic mode of travel, students may strap on mountain climbing harnesses and pull themselves along suspended cables to a series of wooden platforms built in the trees.

Highlights at the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve include butterfly gardens, reptile and amphibian exhibitions, hummingbird gardens, and a visit to an orchid garden. Night tours feature beautiful sunsets and a naturalist guide who explains the many unique elements of the forest and its inhabitants.

In addition to rain forests, Costa Rica is a land of volcanoes, waterfalls, and rivers. One of the most popular ways to explore its waterways is snorkeling. Here, students get in touch with the colorful underwater world where eels, lobsters, schools of fish, and the spectacular whale shark make their home. This is also a great time to try out the new sport of "Canyoning," the exciting adventure of rappelling down waterfalls. If that's too adventurous, students can take a relaxing dip in volcano-heated waters after a hike on the active Arenal Volcano.

The capital city of San Jose is an open gateway to the country's many interesting destinations. Costa Rica's National Museum, located in the ancient Bellavista Fort, is the guardian of the country's precious treasures and cultural heritage. The Jade Museum presents a number of important archaeological pieces, in addition to jade pieces and pottery. Presenting the rich culture of Costa Rica, Central Market is the city's colorful marketplace. Within the cozy warren of alleyways, students discover flowers, baskets, spices, fresh goods, and souvenirs. At the nearby Pre-Columbian Gold Museum, visitors view more than 2,000 glittering pre-Colombian gold artifacts.

About the Author

[Travel Adventures](#) Travel Adventures is a student tour provider staffed by educators who understand the needs of teachers. It has served over one half million students since 1987 and its mission is to "empower teachers to create change by expanding the classroom to the world."

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