



# 100 Cool Things to Do in Costa Rica

By: Costa Rica Guy

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# Costa Rica Who?




## About the Author

Scott Bowers (alias, Costa Rica Guy) has lived in Costa Rica since 2001. He is the founder, chief itinerary designer and fire-putter-outer at Package Costa Rica, an online business that designs and manages Costa Rica vacations. He has been doing that since 2004. He is also the COB (Chief Operating Blogger) at [www.costaricaguy.com](http://www.costaricaguy.com).

In his own words...

I began my Costa Rica journey in 2001 when I arrived on business. I never left. I guess that in itself might explain a little bit of my love for the place. I have been setting up vacations and blogging about life in Costa Rica (and in general) ever since that fateful day in October when I first set foot on Costa Rica soil.

# 10 Cool Things to do in 10 Cool Places!



## About the Book

This little eBook book was created from a series of blog posts I did on 10 Cool Things to Do in 10 Cool Places...

- San Jose
- Dominical
- Manuel Antonio
- Tamarindo
- Arenal
- Caribbean
- Osa Peninsula
- Nicoya Peninsula
- Jaco
- Monteverde

I hope you find it both entertaining and informative.

# 10 Cool Things to do in San Jose





It is common to either start or finish your [Costa Rica vacation](#) in San Jose. There is some misinformation out there saying San Jose is boring. That there is nothing to do or see. Quite to the contrary. I lived in San Jose for 10 years and I can tell you that there is plenty to see and plenty to do. Below are 10 cool things to do in San Jose.

Many of the things listed will require a full free day in San Jose. They are close enough to go see them and then return (a "day tour"), but they are not something you can do in, say, a couple hours time. For that, I recommend the general city tour stuff.

### **Cool Thing #1: Take a dance lesson at Merecumbe**

Anyone can quickly see after spending a little time in Costa Rica that dancing is an integral part of the culture. Here we dance all the Latin styles, including Salsa, Meringue, Cumbia, Bachata, Bolero, etc. So, when in Rome, why not do as the Romans (or in this case Ticos) and learn a step or two? The best place to do that is Merecumbe dance studios. They are located all over the city, so wherever you might find yourself in San Jose, there is probably one close by. I recommend taking a private one to two hour lesson and you will be dancing the basics in no time.

[Merecumbe web site \(with studio locations\)](#)

### **Cool Thing #2: Go dancing at Castro's Bar**

After your dance lesson it's time to practice. The place to do that is Castro's Bar. Sure there are many more modern style discos, but Castro's is the real deal. Old time Latin bar/disco with real Latin dance music and a great cultural flare. You can also learn a great deal just watching the pros. There is also a karaoke bar upstairs. Castro's is located in Barrio Mexico, very close to the downtown area.

[Castro's Bar Facebook Page](#)



### Cool Thing #3: Explore Valle de Orosi

I love the Orosi Valley. It is serene and picturesque and there are many places to see over there. You can take an Orosi Valley tour, or if you can get access to a car, drive there yourself. Places to see include the oldest operating church in Costa Rica, the ruins of Ujarras, the represa hidroelectrica (or damn) Cachi, and Casa del Soñador. You also must have lunch at La Casona del Cafetal. Expect to spend a full day.

[La Casona del Cafetal web site](#)

[Video of Casa del Soñador](#)

### Cool Thing #4: Explore Turrialba

This is another great day trip. Like Orosi, you can find a tour, or just go. To do the latter you will need transportation. You can take a bus, or drive yourself. It is about 2 hours from San Jose central. The area itself is breathtakingly beautiful. Places to see are the volcano itself (Turrialba), CATIE University, the Rio Pejiyabe area (including lunch at [Casa Turire](#)), Hacienda Tayutic and the Guayabo National Monument (Costa Rica's most significant archaeological site). I highly recommend lunch at a little tico restaurant by the name of El Clon (fantastic!). This area is so rich in stuff to see and do that I could do a 10 cool things just for it.

[CATIE University web site](#)

[Guayabo National Monument Photo Set](#)

[Hacienda Tayutic web site](#)





### **Cool Thing #5: Lunch at Chubascos**

If you are already planning a trip to the Poas Volcano then a stop over for lunch at Chubascos is a great idea. It's even a great idea to go over there just for the lunch. This has been one of my favorite restaurants for years. It is about one hour out of the city on the road to the Poas Volcano. The food and ambiance are both healthy and delicious.

[Chubascos restaurant web site](#)

### **Cool Thing #6: Dinner at Cacique Aserri**

The best chicharones in Costa Rica, hands down! If you don't know what chicharones are and fried pork is still on your diet, then you need to try this place. Delicious for sure, healthy, ummm, so so. But a cold Imperial and a plate of chicharones from this place sure hits my spot. On weekend nights they usually have marimba players and sometimes a mascarada, which features dancers wearing humongous caricatured masks. A real tico cultural experience.

[Cacique Aserri web site](#)

### **Cool Thing #7: Dinner at Ram Luna or Tiquicia**

These are two great Mirador restaurants with panoramic views of the city. Best to go at night for the view with lights. The food is also great. Tiquicia is located in Escazu and closer to the central part of the city. Ram Luna is located in Aserri, not too far from Cacique Aserri, so a little further out. Both feature tico cultural shows on certain nights.

[Ram Luna Facebook page](#)

[Mirador Tiquicia web site](#)

### **Cool Thing #8: Go walking through Sabana Park**

Sabana park is the largest park in the city. It is often described as Los Pulmones de San Jose (or, the lungs of the city). Why? Because on weekends thousands gather there to relax and take a deep breath. It is also where our new National Stadium is located, a gift from the Chinese that is truly impressive. This cool thing can be done in a couple hours, so if you have time to kill and don't know what to do, go take a walk in the park. Try a granizado while you're at it.

[Sabana Park photo set](#)

### **Cool Thing #9: Sarchi and Bajos del Toro**

Another of my great escapes from the city. To get there you will need to drive through the little towns of Grecia and Sarchi. In Grecia stop and take a look at the famous metal church. And in Sarchi you will find the furniture, arts and crafts capital of the country. A good idea is to stop at the Chaverri Painted Oxcart factory to see how these artifacts of Costa Rican culture are created. The central park of downtown Sarchi features the world's largest painted oxcart. Then you will need to virtually leave civilization and head towards Bajos. You have to drive over a very narrow mountain road with breathtaking views. You will go down into a little valley to the town of Toro Amarillo. There you can stop at Nena's and have an excellent trucha entero (or whole-fried trout). But the place you must see is the Catarata del Toro. It is a 90 foot fall that is one of the most amazing displays of nature you will find in Costa Rica.

[Catarata del Toro web site](#)

### **Cool Thing #10: Go see a volcano (and a different Central valley perspective)**

The Arenal Volcano is not the only one in Costa Rica. It seems many think so. But within a short drive from San Jose you can visit three other active volcanoes. One was already mentioned above, Turrialba. The other two are Irazu (Costa Rica's highest) and Poas (with one of the largest active craters in the world). It is recommended to always go very early in the morning, or else your view will be obstructed by clouds on most days. The countryside surrounding these volcanoes is breathtaking and you will see spectacular panoramic views of the city. Places to eat, or have a drink, abound as well. These are great avenues for exploration not too far from the city.

Now that you have read about the above 10 cool things to do in San Jose, I don't want to hear any more complaints about boredom in the big city. Enjoy!





# 10 Cool Things to do in Dominical





Also, these are cool things in the "general area" of Dominical, which according to my definition would include Dominicalito, Uvita, even Perez Zeledon (which is just 30 minutes up the mountain, or vice versa). But, most tourists actually stay in Dominical, hence, the title 10 Cool Things to Do in Dominical.

### **Cool Thing #1: Nauyaca Falls by Horseback**

Nauyaca is only about 15 minutes up the mountain from Dominical, on the road that leads to Perez Zeledon. You can do a pre-arranged horseback tour, or just go there and pay a small entrance fee and hike to the falls. The tour is around 5 hours total and includes breakfast and lunch. The falls are gorgeous and really a must see in this area. The pool is large and deep, with clean and cool water that is great for swimming. You can even climb up on the rocks about 3 to 4 meters and jump, if you dare.

[Nauyaca Falls Tour link](#)

### **Cool Thing #2: Diamante Waterfall Hike**

This tour fits the bill for the more adventurous. There are no horses involved here, since the hike up is practically vertical. You are climbing the famous Tinamastes Ridge that rises some 1,000 feet vertically to form a breathtaking panorama at the highest point on the beach road from Dominical to Perez Zeledon. The 600 foot Diamante Fall is said to be the highest waterfall in the country. Above the main fall are twin smaller falls. Behind them is a cave where lunch will be served. I said cool, didn't I? You can even do an overnight tour and spend the night in the cave (with all meals cooked right there for you)!

[Diamante Waterfall Hike link](#)

### **Cool Thing #3: Beach Day at Playa Hermosa**

Dominical is a happening little beach community. It is a surfer town because the waves are the most powerful in the area. However, it is also where the Baru River dumps into the ocean and that causes the beach to be quite littered with debris, such as river rocks and driftwood. Also, the waves and currents of the ocean can be very dangerous. So, if you want a more pleasant beach experience, for swimming and soaking up the rays, I highly suggest my favorite beach. That is Playa Hermosa and it is a 15 minute drive further south towards Uvita. The beach at Playa Hermosa is, well, hermosa (beautiful). It is wide and long and great for walking. The waves can still get pretty big and powerful and there are no lifeguards, so swim at your own risk. But it is safer than Dominical.

### **Cool Thing #4: Lunch and Waterfall Hike at El Pavon**

El Pavon is a typical Costa Rican family restaurant about 30 minutes south of Dominical. Their specialty is home grown Tilapia entero, which means the fish is fried and served whole, head on. After lunch make sure to hike over to the waterfall by the same name. It is really unique in that a large rock the shape of an egg became lodged right at the top of the fall. Makes for one heck of a photo opportunity.

[El Pavon Restaurant Facebook page](#)

### **Cool Thing #5: Cultural Tour to Boruca Indigenous Reserve**

Getting to the Boruca Reserve is a bit of a challenge, but well worth it. The best way is take the Costanera all the way south until it connects with the Pan American Highway. Then go back in the direction of Buenos Aires until you see the sign that says Boruca Reserve. You will then take a dirt road for 45 minutes or so into the reserve. The indigenous of this area are known for their intricately carved ceremonial masks and hand-made cloth items. I have been offering both for [sale on Ebay](#) for some time (actually I used to have a small store in San Jose as well). You will probably want to buy some things, so bring cash. A typical mask will run you anywhere from \$100 to \$200 dollars, depending on size and artistry. You can also hike to the waterfall. The reserve has a museum and normally there are tribe members demonstrating how they make their arts and crafts. Really cool stuff! Make sure to learn how to say "how are you" in Brunka, the language of the indigenous in this area.

[Boruca Indigenous Reserve Video link](#)

[Boruca Indigenous Reserve web site link](#)

### **Cool Thing #6: Snorkel or Dive Tour off Isla del Caño**

Isla del Caño offers the best diving and snorkeling in the area and some of the best in the country. Getting there is quite the adventure. There are tours that offer this and here is how they work. You will take a van from Dominical down to Sierpe. From there you will board a power boat that will take you down the Sierpe River, out into the Pacific and on to the island.



All in all, the transportation portion will take approximately 2.5 hours each way. But like I said, it will be an adventure with many worthwhile sites and experiences along the way. And the snorkeling (or diving) is really good.

[Snorkel and Dive Isla del Caño link](#)

### **Cool Thing #7: Sierpe River and Mangroves**

You can also just go to Sierpe for the fun of it. If you do there are a few things to see and do. Make sure one of them is to stop and marvel at the ancient stone spheres that no one really knows how or why they happen to be there. It is assumed the indigenous carved them for some purpose, but no one knows for sure. Maybe aliens? While in Sierpe have a great lunch and then take a boat ride over to the mangrove estuary, where you can see some interesting flora and fauna. The river ride is fun in itself and you will be sure to see some crocs or caimans resting on the river banks.

### **Cool Thing #8: Day Hike of Corcovado National Park (San Pedrillo Station)**

This is done via a tour that is much like what was described above with respect to Isla del Caño. On this one, rather than keep steaming out to sea in the direction of the island, you will hug the coast until you arrive to the San Pedrillo Ranger Station. There you will take a 2 hour guided hike into the jungle of Corcovado National Park (the most biologically diverse place on earth). To be honest, this part of the park gets more human traffic, so the wildlife is not as prevalent as it is deeper inside the park. But it is still a cool tour.

[Corcovado Day Tour link](#)



## Cool Thing #9: Hacienda Baru Wildlife Refuge

This is within walking distance of Dominical, just down the Costanera Highway a couple kilometers (in the direction of Quepos). Hacienda Barú's 330 hectares (815 acres) have a fantastic variety of habitats, from wetlands and secondary rainforests in the lowlands to primary rain-forest on the highland coastal ridge. Seven kilometers of walking trails and three kilometers of pristine beach are there to be explored as well as orchid and butterfly gardens.

[Haciendo Baru web page link](#)

## Cool Thing #10: Beach Day at Marina Ballena National Park

The Marina Ballena National Park is where the famous whale's tail formation is located. This is a rocky sand bar just off the coast that fans out and forms what appears from above to be a whale's tail. That is extremely coincidental as this coastal area also happens to be an important migratory route for the humpback whale. The park is a great place to go and spend the day at the beach. But my strong recommendation is to look at a tide chart and make sure you arrive on a falling tide. Only at low tide can you walk all the way out to the whale's tail and that is really a cool thing to do. The ocean water on each side of the bar is calm and crystal clear, great for swimming, or snorkeling.

[Marina Ballena National Park photos link](#)

There you have it, my 10 Cool Things to Do in Dominical. Oh and I have to put in a shameless plug for our [Southern Pacific vacation design](#), that can be customized to include any, or all, of these 10 way cool things.



10 Cool Things  
to do in

Manuel Antonio







This time we're talking 10 cool things to do in Manuel Antonio. Anyone considering Costa Rica as a vacation destination has surely already heard about this place. It is home to the smallest, yet highly popular, Manuel Antonio National Park. Visiting the park is obviously a cool thing to do, but here are 10 others that you might want to consider as well.

### **Cool Thing #1: Kayak tour of the Damas Island Mangrove Estuary**

Outside of the Manuel Antonio National Park itself, the Damas Island mangrove estuary is one of the richest locations in the area for flora and fauna. Several tour companies offer this tour. If you don't like the idea of a kayak tour, you can also do it by boat.

[Damas Island Kayak with Iguana Tours](#)

### **Cool Thing #2: Have a drink in the bat cave at La Mansion**

I have always loved La Mansion Inn both for the ambiance of the place and the great people who work there. The bat cave is one of its really cool and unique amenities. This is a bar that is inside a cave that is inside of the hotel. Sounds pretty cool, ey? The bat cave bar even has a mini-dance floor with disco lights.

[La Mansion Bat Cave Bar](#)

### **Cool Thing #3: Go Rafting on the Savegre or Naranjo Rivers**

There are two exciting rafting experiences one can have in the Manuel Antonio area. The Savegre is a laid back raft (Class II to III) and great for nature viewing and very kid friendly (minimum age is around 8, depending on the tour operator). The Naranjo is more of a thrill

with rapids that can reach Class IV. The Naranjo lower portion doesn't run during the summer season as the river level gets too low, but the upper Naranjo (El Chorro) does. This section of the river cuts through a narrow canyon requiring extremely technical maneuvering and rapids of the Class IV level.

[Iguana Tours - Savegre Raft](#)

[Iguana Tours - Naranjo Raft](#)

### **Cool Thing #4: Lunch or dinner at El Gran Escape**

This is a little restaurant in Quepos that has long been one of my favorites. Great tuna steak with a lush green salad. Yummy!

[El Gran Escape web page](#)

### **Cool Thing #5: Romantic dinner at Capi Capi**

If you want to have a romantic candlelight type dinner, this is the place I would recommend. We have even had a few customers propose marriage here. I suggest reservations as the place is very small with limited tables. If you're wondering about the name, it is the common greeting of the Maleku indigenous group that live in a completely different area. But still a cool name.

[Kapi Kapi web page](#)

### **Cool Thing #6: Hire a private guide for a Manuel Antonio National Park tour**

There are a few ways "to do" the park. You can just go for the beach, since the park features several beautiful ones. You can take a guided group tour, but that puts you on a schedule with other obnoxious tourists, which many people don't want. Or, you can go in the morning and hire one of the guides that offer their services at the park entrance. Cost is around \$50 for a group of four and they will show you stuff you would never see on your own. That's my recommendation. You can always come back later for the beach, but you need to see the stuff that lives in there.

### **Cool Thing #7: Go to the beach at Playitas**

Manuel Antonio is no secret spot. The word is definitely out and this place can get super crowded. If you want a beach that gets less traffic, try Playitas. It is within walking distance of the many hotels that are on the "hotel" road (the one where you will find Arenas del Mar, La Mansion, La Mariposa and several others). If you have a 4x4, you can even drive out on the beach. Bring a surfboard too because the waves can get good there. A little rocky out in the ocean so swim with caution.

### **Cool Thing #8: Visit Los Campesinos Reserve**

The Campesinos Reserve is on the lower Savegre River, 25 km (15.5 miles) east of Quepos and Manuel Antonio National Park. There you will discover the longest hanging bridge in the region, which passes through an impressive natural landscape with a marvelous waterfall. There are several trails to extraordinary places such as the Los Chorros waterfall and natural



pools, and there are strategic points for enjoying gorgeous views of Manuel Antonio. The highest point in the forest has a tramway.

[ACTUAR Costa Rica Los Campesinos day tour](#)

### **Cool Thing #9: Take a surf lesson with MASS**

We have been using Manual Antonio Surf School (MASS) as our preferred surfing lesson provider in this area for years. They have a cool "surf and turf" tour that combines a tour of the best breaks with instructions and surf time.

[MASS Surf School Facebook Page](#)

### **Cool Thing #10: Have a pescado entero by the beach**

The old Mar y Sombra restaurant and disco used to be the place for this (and dancing the night away). However, it was demolished for mysterious reasons. Nevertheless, just down the beach there is another great little place to sit and watch the waves, drink an Imperial and eat a delicious whole fried red snapper. In fact there are several places to do this in "downtown" Manuel Antonio. You must eat a "pescado entero" at least once on your visit there.

Of course, need I say that our [custom Costa Rica vacation](#) designs feature many of the 10 cool things to do in Manuel Antonio mentioned in this post.



10 Cool Things  
to do in  
Tamarindo







Today's post takes us to the Northwestern province of Guanacaste and the popular beach town known as Tamarindo. It is the "Jaco" of Guanacaste (as much as Jaco is the "Tamarindo" of Puntarenas). It is a bustling beach community that has become increasingly commercialized over the years. Nevertheless, it is extremely popular for the party atmosphere, beautiful beach and good waves.

Today's 10 cool things takes a deeper than average look at what there really is to do in Tamarindo (and the surrounding area).

### **Cool Thing #1: Visit El Viejo Wetlands Wildlife Refuge**

El Viejo is a wildlife refuge located about an hour away from Tamarindo. There you can engage in a number of activities, including a boat tour of Palo Verde National Park (great for bird watchers), a canopy tour, a historic tour, or a horseback ride. They have packages that include your selection of some or all of the above activities. Great family fun.

[El Viejo Wetlands website](#)

### **Cool Thing #2: Excursion to Santa Rosa National Park**

This is the historic location where in 1856 Costa Rica repelled an invasion attempt by the notorious "filibusterer" William Walker. The epic event was known as "the 2nd battle of Rivas" and it is where a young farmer named Juan Santamaria volunteered to set fire to a farm house known as "La Casona" where Walker's forces were housed. He was mortally wounded in the attempt, but succeeded and this marked a major turning point that led to Costa Rica's repelling the invasion attempt. The renovated farm building still stands today and is the park's

major attraction. The park is also home to an important and endangered eco-system, the tropical dry forest. And there you will find the beautiful beaches of Playas Nancite and Naranjo. Naranjo is where the famous Witch's Rock is located....for the surfers!

[Santa Rosa National Park website](#)

### **Cool Thing #3: Immerse in culture in Guaitil**

This tiny little town about an hour away from Tamarindo is famous for one thing, Chorotega pottery. This is a style of making pottery that was handed down by the Chorotega indigenous tribe that once dominated this area in the pre-Columbian era. You will find that almost the entire pueblo is dedicated to the art and there are ample opportunities for buying beautiful pieces there. You will also get the chance to see the process they use from start to finish. Really cool and interesting stuff!

[My Chorotega Pottery Video](#)

### **Cool Thing #4: Turtle watching at Playas Grande or Langosta**

Beaches in this area are important nesting grounds for many species of endangered sea turtles, including the leatherback, olive ridley, and carey. Playa Grande is most notable for the nesting of giant leatherbacks, which nest there during a period that extends from October to February of each year. Playa Langosta is another nesting ground for this species. The three beaches of Playa Langosta, Grande and Ventanas together form the Las Baulas Marine National Park.

[The Leatherback Trust website](#)

### **Cool Thing #5: Take a sunset cruise**

Tamarindo is known for its spectacular sunsets. A super romantic (and cool) way to see one is on a boat in the ocean. And there are a couple great options in the area for doing so. See website links below.

[Blue Dolphing Sailing](#)

[Marlin del Rey](#)

### **Cool Thing #6: Go diving or snorkeling**

There are some good snorkeling and diving opportunities in the area. Probably the best known and accessible are the Catalina Islands about 10 miles north and 45 minutes out to sea.

[Agua Rica Dive tours](#)

### **Cool Thing #7: Go see the Rincon de la Vieja volcano**

Many of our customers want the [Arenal and Tamarindo combo](#), since all their friends have mentioned the Arenal Volcano as a must see in Costa Rica. Well, I am not going to argue with that, but Arenal is too far away from Tamarindo to see in a day's time. Rincon de la Vieja, however, is close and spectacular. Yes, it is an active volcano. But unlike Arenal, you can hike





to the crater. And the Rincon de la Vieja National Park is one of the most beautiful in the country.

[Hacienda Guachipelin website](#)

[Borinquen Resort](#)

### **Cool Thing #8: Go for a swim at the Llanos de Cortez waterfall**

This is a place few know about, except the locals. It is about 20 minutes from Liberia right off the Pan American Highway. From Tamarindo it will take around 1.5 hours to get there. Just a cool place to hang and chill out from the Guanacaste heat. You'll probably be the only ones there.

[Little video I made featuring Catarata Llanos de Cortez](#)

### **Cool Thing #9: Go for a horseback ride on the beach**

Well, Guanacaste is the cowboy culture of Costa Rica and there is no better way to partake of that culture than a ride on the beach. You find that opportunities abound for doing so. Take advantage of one!

### **Cool Thing #10: Play a round of golf**

Wait a minute, is golf cool? Well, I guess for its many aficionados it is. Costa Rica is no golf mecca (thank the Lord!), but one area where you can find some good play is Tamarindo. There are actually two gorgeous 18-hole courses nearby, one at Hacienda Pinilla and the other at Westin Playa Conchal Resort.

[Hacienda Pinilla Golf](#)

[Playa Conchal Resort Golf](#)

Hey, writing about these 10 cool things to do in Tamarindo has me itching for a road trip.

It goes without saying (but I'll say it anyway) that at [Package Costa Rica](#), we can customize Costa Rica vacations to include any or all of these 10 cool things to do in Tamarindo.



10 Cool Things  
to do at the

Arenal Volcano





This was an easy one. The area of the Arenal Volcano has so much to see and do that I could tap out ten things with one hand tied behind my back. This area is a pure natural playground that attracts about 90% of Costa Rica's tourism traffic. They say the volcano is not as active as it used to be. Well, who knows, but I still wouldn't stand to close. Even so, these 10 cool things to do at the Arenal Volcano are sure to make your stay at Arenal memorable.

### **Cool Thing #1: Take a boat ride out on Lake Arenal**

Lake Arenal is Costa Rica's largest lake and one of its most important source of electricity. You can't get better views of the volcano than being out in the middle of the lake on a clear day. Best to do it in the late afternoon when the sunlight is most photo friendly. After you're done with the oooing and ahhhing, jump in for a swim, the water is dulce delicious.

[Some cool Lake Arenal by boat pics](#)

### **Cool Thing #2: Hike Cerro Chato**

This is the Arenal Volcano's small sibling. It once was a volcano, but that was a long time ago. Now what you will find at the top is a crater of emerald green water. The hike up is not too long, but quite steep...get ready to sweat. You will be hiking through incredibly lush tropical rain forest and are bound to see some cool critters along the way.

[Some cool pics of my hike up Cerro Chato](#)

### **Cool Thing #3: Go for a swim in the La Fortuna Waterfall**

You can do this a couple ways. One is by horse and the other is by foot. Either way the La



Fortuna waterfall is really a site worth seeing. And a swim in the cool (no, cold) crystal clear water with huge trout darting around is a great way to cool off.

[La Fortuna Waterfall by horseback tour](#)

### **Cool Thing #4: The canyoning tour**

This has been one of our most popular tours for some time. What is "canyoning" you ask? Well, it is trekking down into and through a deep canyon. How? You do it by rappelling down the steep canyon walls, usually beside, if not right in the middle of, falling water. Yes you do get wet! It is thrilling and really puts you in the thick of all that nature.

[Pure Trek Canyoning](#)

[Desafio Lost Canyon tour](#)

### **Cool Thing #5: Go hiking in Tenorio National Park**

Tenorio National Park is a good hour to the north of Arenal, but well worth a visit. It is where the famous sky blue river, Rio Celeste, is located. A hike to the Rio Celeste waterfall on a clear sunny day will be something to remember. It also happens to be one of the 7 Natural Wonders of Costa Rica....no wonder!

[Cool pics of Rio Celeste](#)

### **Cool Thing #6: Visit the Eco-Termas Hot Springs**

This is our pick for the best Hot Springs experience in Costa Rica. Why? Because while other





commercial hot springs have become just that...over commercialized, Eco-Termas has tried to keep itself a secret. For a long time they didn't even have a sign, just a gate with an intercom system. Made you feel like you were trespassing into some tropical wonderland. The springs themselves are super clean and hot. Good food as well. My recommendation is to go at night, when the the lighting makes the place all the more romantic.

[Eco-Termas Hot Spring website](#)

### **Cool Thing #7: Go spelunking in the Venado Caves**

What's cooler than a cave? Ever since man emerged from them, he has had a fascination with going back into them. And in Arenal you can fulfill that fantasy at the Venado Caves, complete with bats and guano.

[Desafio Venado Caves tour](#)

### **Cool Thing #8: A super sustainable stay at Rancho Margot**

Rancho Margot is the ultimate definition of what it means to be a sustainable resort. This place is completely off the grid and supplies its own food, heat, water and sewer. You will be amazed, trust me. For instance, they use compost to heat their water...now is that cool or what? It is also over on the Castillo side, which in my opinion is the most beautiful of all Arenal locations.

[Rancho Margot website](#)



### **Cool Thing #9: Go dancing at the area's only disco**

Spending your days getting close to all that nature can wear you out. So after a full day of it, you might want to relax throwing back a few Imperials (or whatever) and maybe even some Latin dancing if you're up for it. Well, you will have that opportunity as well at the area's largest (and only) disco...the Vulcan Look.

### **Cool Thing #10: Wildlife viewing in Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge**

Like Tenorio, Caño Negro is a bit of a hike (by car) from Arenal (over an hour), but also well worth it. This is a wetlands area that is home to a large number of migratory birds. A boat cruise down the Rio Frio will put you up close and personal with all kinds of jungle creatures....maybe even a Jabiru Stork, the largest of Costa Rica's birds. And of course there are the crocs and caimans.

[Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge wiki](#)

Take my advice and try out a few of the above cool things to do at the Arenal Volcano. We feature a number of [vacation designs](#) where you could easily fit them in.



10 Cool Things  
to do on the

Costa Rica Caribbean





What a special place Costa Rica is! It is a tiny country with a whole lot of fun packed in. For instance, we have a gorgeous Pacific coastline with more great beaches than I can count. In fact, most people think of our Pacific when they think of Costa Rica beach destinations. But that ignores the fact that we have another coastline that is just as rich in beauty and adventure, the Caribbean.

The Caribbean has a culture and a "vibe" of its very own. There is no other place like it in Costa Rica. On the Caribbean you will find pristine coral reefs, great food, gorgeous beaches, lush jungles teeming with biodiversity, and people who are all smiles. It is the cultural aspect that really makes this place special to me. I highly recommend you add it to the Costa Rica wish-list and make sure to also include some of the following super cool things to do on the Costa Rican Caribbean.

### **Cool Thing #1: Turtle watching at Tortuguero**

Tortuguero is one of the truly special places of Costa Rica. Our customers often do one of the [Tortuguero all-inclusive packages](#) that include the lodging, meals, transportation and tours. That is the best way to do Tortuguero as it is a place surrounded by water. Even though Tortuguero is a great place to visit any time of the year, if you can catch it during the green sea turtle nesting season, all the better. This is one of the most endangered marine turtle species on the planet and Tortuguero is its most important nesting ground. But to see this spectacle of nature you need to visit during the months of July through October.

[Tortuguero Information site](#)

## **Cool Thing #2: Visit the Jaguar Animal Rescue Center**

The Jaguar Animal Rescue Center in Playa Chiquita is a non-profit foundation to rehabilitate mistreated, injured and/or confiscated animals, which are then reintroduced to their natural habitat in protected areas. It is also a great place to get up close and personal with these amazing creatures.

[Jaguar Rescue Center website](#)

## **Cool Thing #3: Day at the beach at Manzanillo-Gandoca Wildlife Refuge**

If you caught my [Favorite Place in Costa Rica post](#), you know that this place is very high on my list of favorites. Why? Because it is stunningly beautiful, untarnished and uncrowded. You just won't find coastal landscapes anywhere in Costa Rica (perhaps on earth) that can rival some of those you will see in the Manzanillo-Gandoca Refuge. Also it is home to an important ecological system, the coral reef. This greatly multiplies the depth of overall biodiversity that in this place exists both on the land and in the sea.

[Almonds and Corals lodge](#)

## **Cool Thing #4: Eat rice and beans at [pretty much everywhere]**

Just as gallo pinto is the signature dish of Costa Rica everywhere else, on the Caribbean side, it is coconut flavored "rice and beans." The stuff is super rich, so don't eat too much or you'll be putting de lime en de coconut. Where can you find the stuff? As previously indicated, pretty much everywhere. Try it with fish.

## **Cool Thing #5: Visit the Bribri Indigenous Reserve**

The Talamanca Mountains hug the southern Caribbean coast and they are home to many of Costa Rica's indigenous groups. These include the Cabecares and Bribri. Visiting the Bribri reserve close to Puerto Viejo will be an incredible cultural experience. You can also stop over at the "Chocolate House" and see how they make chocolate as well as other aspects of their culture. If you would like to get involved in helping the many challenges these groups face, stop and have a talk with Barry Stevens at El Puente in Puerto Viejo. Barry and his wife have been in the area for years assisting Bribri and Cabecar families in making sure their children receive an education.

[My video of the Bribri reserve](#)

## **Cool Thing #6: Visit the Kekoldi Indigenous Reserve**

The Kekoldi Reserve is a unique Bribri reserve in that its members are known for their iguana farming methods. Try an iguana egg while you're there.

[Tours of the Kekoldi Reserve](#)

## **Cool Thing #7: Day at the beach at Cahuita National Park**

Cahuita National Park is another one of those places on the Caribbean side that just makes you shake your head and wonder why everyone doesn't visit. It is a long stretch of white sand



beach, with crystal clear water, coral reefs offshore and lush jungle. A great place to soak up the rays, or go for a long nature hike.

[Some personal photos of the Cahuita area](#)

### **Cool Thing #8: Reggae and Calypso music at Cocos Bar in Cahuita**

The two most happening Southern Caribbean coastal communities are those of Cahuita and Puerto Viejo. Puerto Viejo is a bit busier than Cahuita. But there is one place in Cahuita that is sure to be rocking every weekend. That is Coco's Bar that always features local Reggae and Calypso musical talent. A great place to throw down a good night of partying.

[Cocos Bar website](#)

### **Cool Thing #9: Eat Marlin Cevichi at Sobre Las Olas Restaurant in Cahuita**

I love this little place that sits right over the crashing waves of Playa Negra in the Cahuita area. One night I was eating there with my daughter and after a bit we both noticed a disturbance in the tree with low hanging limbs just above our table. We looked up and there was a magnificent sloth watching us have our dinner. Maybe he was hungry? This place has a unique item on the menu that I go there just for....the marlin cevichi. I love cevichi in all its forms, but this recipe is perhaps the best I've had in Costa Rica.

[Video of Sobre Las Olas](#)

## **Cool Thing #10: Go tarpon fishing at the Barra del Colorado Wildlife Refuge**

This is one of the few places that I've never been too. However, I have heard great things about it. It is very remote, located in the far northeastern corner along the border with Nicaragua. In fact, recently we had a little incident (some called an "invasion") when Nicaraguan troops decided to set up camp across the border at a place called Isla Calero. Thankfully things died down without anything more than a lot of "saber-rattling." The area is well-known for its tarpon fishing and there are a number of lodges that specialize in this activity.

[Rio Colorado Tarpon Fishing](#)

The Caribbean is wild and untamed, but also laid back and friendly. If you're looking to do something different from the rest of the crowd, try the Caribbean. It also has a different weather pattern, so that during months of heaviest rain on the Pacific, you can find sunshine on the Caribbean.





10 Cool Things  
to do on the

Osa Peninsula





The coolest place in Costa Rica (in my humble opinion) is the Osa Peninsula. Why? Because it is Costa Rica in its wildest and most untamed nature. A large chunk of the peninsula is the [Corcovado National Park](#). That is the same one that National Geographic boldly proclaimed the most biologically intense place on earth. Trekking in the park is one of the obvious cool things to do on the Osa Peninsula. Below are a few other cool things and some specific ways you might consider experiencing this marvel of nature.

### **Cool Thing #1: Visit Cabo Matapalo**

Cabo Matapalo is the extreme southeastern tip of the peninsula. It is about 45 minutes from the town of Puerto Jimenez and next door to the Corcovado National Park. This place boasts some really great surf with long rights that rival the long lefts of Pavones. The place is serene and full of wildlife. It is also very close to Lapa Rios (see below).

### **Cool Thing #2: Super sustainable stay at Lapa Rios Eco-Lodge**

Lapa Rios is the grandfather of eco-resorts not just in Costa Rica, but perhaps the entire world. It was built by John and Karen Lewis who left corporate-style U.S. careers to come to Costa Rica and make a difference...and indeed they did. So much so, that in 2005 the resort they founded was the recipient of the [2005 Award for Corporate Excellence](#). An award presented to them by U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. But if you want to stay there, make your reservation early! It will be a great experience demonstrating how sustainability does not have to be inconsistent with profitability.

[Lapa Rios web site](#)



### **Cool Thing #3: Visit Sirena Station in the heart of Corcovado**

There are several ranger stations one can visit, but this one is right in the heart of the park. It is the most remote, gets the least human traffic and therefore has the most wildlife to view. You can hike to it, take a plane to it, or go by boat. Hiking will take a couple of days from Puerto Jimenez, or a day from La Leona (see below). You can take a boat from Drake Bay and that takes about 1.5 hours. Regardless of how you get there, get ready for a magical experience of Corcovado that you will never forget.

[Personal video of visit to Sirena Station](#)

[My personal Sirena Station photos](#)

### **Cool Thing #4: Take a boat across the Golfo Dulce to Pavones**

Pavones is one of Costa Rica's most famous surfing locations, if not the most famous. It is often called the world's longest left breaking wave. But getting there by car is a chore. It is possible to take a plane. It is not on the peninsula, but across the gulf near the small strip of land that shares a border with Panama and home to the southernmost tip of Costa Rica, Punta Burica. If you are visiting the park and staying in Puerto Jimenez (as many do), a cool thing to do is take a boat across the Golfo Dulce to Pavones. We once did it and surfed the break from the boat. That was way cool!

### **Cool Thing #5: Rough it in style at the Corcovado Tent Camp**

This may not sound like the way you want to spend your Costa Rica vacation....in a tent. But

the tent camp features really nice tents. And there's something about sleeping in the jungle in a tent that just seems, well, cool. The food is great as well...bunkhouse style. It is great place to meet other trekkers. The grounds are gorgeous. There are numerous hiking trails....heck, just hiking into Drake Bay from the camp is quite an experience. Highly recommended and it ain't really roughing it all that much.

[Corcovado Tent Camp web site](#)

[Personal Photos of Drake Bay and Corcovado Tent Camp](#)

## **Cool Thing #6: Go snorkeling or scuba diving at Caños Island**

From Drake Bay just off the coast is the amazing Isla del Caño. The island is surrounded by vibrant coral reefs that make it perhaps the most popular scuba and snorkeling spot in Costa Rica. There are numerous tours you can sign up for. It is best to visit from Drake Bay, but you can also get there from Sierpe via a longer boat ride down the river and then out into the ocean. I have heard that they currently are not allowing island trekking, which is a shame. On the island you can find the mysterious and ancient stone spheres that are also found in other parts of Costa Rica.

## **Cool Thing #7: Stay overnight at Sirena Station**

As mentioned above, the hand's down best place to see Costa Rica critters, including such endangered ones as the Baird's Tapir and perhaps even a jungle cat, is Sirena Station. You can do a day hike, but if you want to greatly increase the odds of seeing a lot of stuff, stay overnight. The ranger station features very basic dorms. Good idea to bring your own food.

## **Cool Thing #8: Go sport-fishing with Crocodile Bay Lodge**

There are great sport-fishing opportunities off the coast of the Osa Peninsula and in the Golfo Dulce. This place specializes in fishing trips in this area.

[Crocodile Bay Web Site](#)

## **Cool Thing #9: Super eco-intensive stay at La Leona Eco-lodge**

La Leona is another super sustainable eco-lodge. It is located near the La Leona ranger station. This one is about 16 kilometers from Sirena. So, an idea is to start your trek to Sirena at the La Leona Lodge.

[La Leona Eco-lodge web site](#)

## **Cool Thing #10: Surf Cabo Matapalo and Pavones**

Visiting Cabo Matapalo or Pavones strictly for the natural beauty of these places is a great idea. But if you are a surfer and really want to experience Costa Rica surf at its best, these two spots are a must. The waves can be a bit fickle, however, so check surf conditions prior to making the trip. But if you can catch either, or both, when they are "going off", get ready for the ride of a lifetime.



About a year and a half ago I moved to the Southern Zone of Costa Rica. One of the great benefits of doing so is that it puts me in closer proximity to the magical place called the Osa Peninsula. It is off the list of most Costa Rica visits to more well-trod touristic paths, but if you want to see the real "wild-side" (and I ain't talking Jaco nightlife), try some of these cool things to do on the Osa Peninsula!





# 10 Cool Things to do on the Nicoya Peninsula





I always consider going over to the Nicoya Peninsula to be a Costa Rica adventure. I feel as if I am entering some strange, exotic and remote area. And indeed there are places over there that do fit that bill. But it is also home to some gorgeous beaches, fantastic boutique resorts, super waves and lots of natural beauty. It is certainly worth consideration if you are trying to figure out what to do on your [Costa Rica vacation](#). You see, the problem with Costa Rica is not finding something to do, it is choosing what to do from this overwhelming panoply of choices.

Once again, Costa Rica Guy comes to the rescue with this list of 10 cool things to do on the Nicoya Peninsula.

### **Cool Thing #1: Take the ferry**

There's more than one way to cook the goose and likewise to get over to the Nicoya Peninsula. You can take a water taxi from Jaco (pretty cool). You can drive up and around (long, but still cool). Or, you can take the ferry from Puntarenas to Paquera. The ferry is super cool. For one thing, it is relaxing. There is a bar (and for me, that's always good). The views and photo opts abound. And once you get over to the Peninsula, you have a relatively short drive to places like Tambor, Montezuma or Mal Pais (relative, in Costa Rican terms). The ferry is cheap, but make sure to check the schedule, especially during busy periods.

[2013 Ferry Schedule](#)

### **Cool Thing #2: Or the bridge**

Used to be that the ferry was the only real choice because driving meant having to go way north and then come back down. But that was until the generous government of Taiwan

decided to build us a bridge over the Tempisque river. I believe it is the largest bridge in the country. Driving over this way isn't too bad and very scenic. You will pass through some cool places. It is also the preferred way if your Nicoya destination is Samara beach, or points northwards such as Nosara. Stop and have a cold one at one of the "chicheros" (little bars) that are ubiquitous across the Costa Rican landscape. They are one of my personal joys of traveling in Costa Rica and a cool way to get cultured.

### **Cool Thing #3: Stay at Ylang Ylang in Cool Montezuma**

Montezuma is one of the coolest little beach towns in the country. It has a decided bohemian (maybe "hippy" is a better word) flare to it. Some even refer to it as "Monte-fuma" as you will find that "Montezumians" (tourists and locals alike) do like to take a toke once in a while. The area offers a gorgeous beach and tropical ambiance. There are many places to stay, but none quite as cool as Ylang Ylang. This place features cool bungalows right off a beautiful beach. To get there you generally have to walk down the beach (unless the hotel staff comes and gets you in their quasi-amphibious 4x4). I don't know about you, but a hotel that I have to walk down the beach to get to, now that's cool. The bungalows are super nice and their rates feature breakfast and dinner....also way cool.

[Ylang Ylang Beach Resort](#)

### **Cool Thing #4: Take a Panga to Tortuga Island**

The Tortuga Island tour has been a popular one in Costa Rica for decades. From Puntarenas you can get on a big luxury catamaran, fully equipped with a wet bar and Jacuzzis. You'll be doing the tour with a bunch of crazy Spring Breakers. Hey, it's fairly cool, I'll admit. But a far cooler way, is to take a little "panga" (small motorized boat generally used for fishing) with a couple of locals out to the island and have them cook up some lunch for you while you frolic on the beach or snorkel in the schools of brightly colored fish. You can do such a tour from a place like Montezuma, which is very close to the island.

### **Cool Thing #5: Yoga at Nosara**

Nosara is Costa Rica's yoga mecca. It features many Yoga focused hotels and is home to the Nosara Yoga Institute. So if you are in to the ohms, then Nosara is probably a place you will want to consider.

[Nosara Yoga Institute](#)

### **Cool Thing #6: Surf!**

Surf on the Nosara Peninsula is damn cool. The entire coastline is littered with great breaks. Top choices include Santa Teresa, Mal Pais and Nosara. I especially like Nosara for its consistent and usually medium-sized waves with long super fun rides (a long-boarder's dream). The coastline of the Nicoya Peninsula was surely handcrafted by God for surfing exploration.

### **Cool Thing #7: Stay at Punta Islita**

Another one of those super sustainable, yet ultra-luxurious boutique resorts that Costa Rica is



famous for. You can even fly into the airport there, as the drive is a little harrowing. You will also enjoy The Islita Art Museum, which is the flagship of Hotel Punta Islita's sustainability model. This innovative program pairs established Costa Rican artists with local counterparts, transforming Islita village into a living museum featuring colorful murals, installations, and sculptures.

[Punta Islita Sustainable Resort](#)

### **Cool Thing #8: Cultural Tour at Isla de Chira**

Another really cool thing to do is a stay over at the Posada Rural la Amistad eco-lodge on Isla de Chira in the Golfo de Nicoya. This rural tourism opportunity was established by local women to promote tourism to the island and a better quality of life for the islanders. Spend the days biking around the island, take a boat to explore the mangroves in search for the rare salt-water crocodile, go searching for Piangua clams, visit the local artisan shop where women help support their families by making jewelry from local materials, and learn how to fish with traditional hook and line (bring back your catch for dinner). All really cool stuff.

[La Amistad Isla de Chira](#)

### **Cool Thing #9: Nature Tour of Curú Wildlife Refuge**

Costa Rica's first established private wildlife refuge, Curú National Wildlife Refuge and Hacienda is located on the southern end of the Nicoya Peninsula. The area is teeming with abundant wildlife and hosts one of the most beautiful beaches and protected bays on the Nicoya Peninsula. In the refuge you can find species such as diverse as white-faced monkeys, howler monkeys, spider monkeys, scarlet macaws, white-tailed deer, collared

peccary, coati, raccoons, coyotes, iguanas, and hundreds of species of tropical and migratory birds.

Curú Wildlife Refuge

## **Cool Thing #10: Hike to Montezuma Waterfall**

I already mentioned above the coolness of this place called Montezuma. Well, wouldn't you know it, but there is a waterfall too. The hike to the fall is an easy 30 minutes. It is gorgeous and a great place to plunge in for a cool swim.

It is hard to write these lists and not feel remorseful about the things that I neglected to mention. But I am trying to pare them down to a manageable level. If I tried to list all the cool things to do on the Nicoya Peninsula, or any of the other cool places in Costa Rica for that matter, these posts would go on and on forever. Yes, Costa Rica really is that cool!

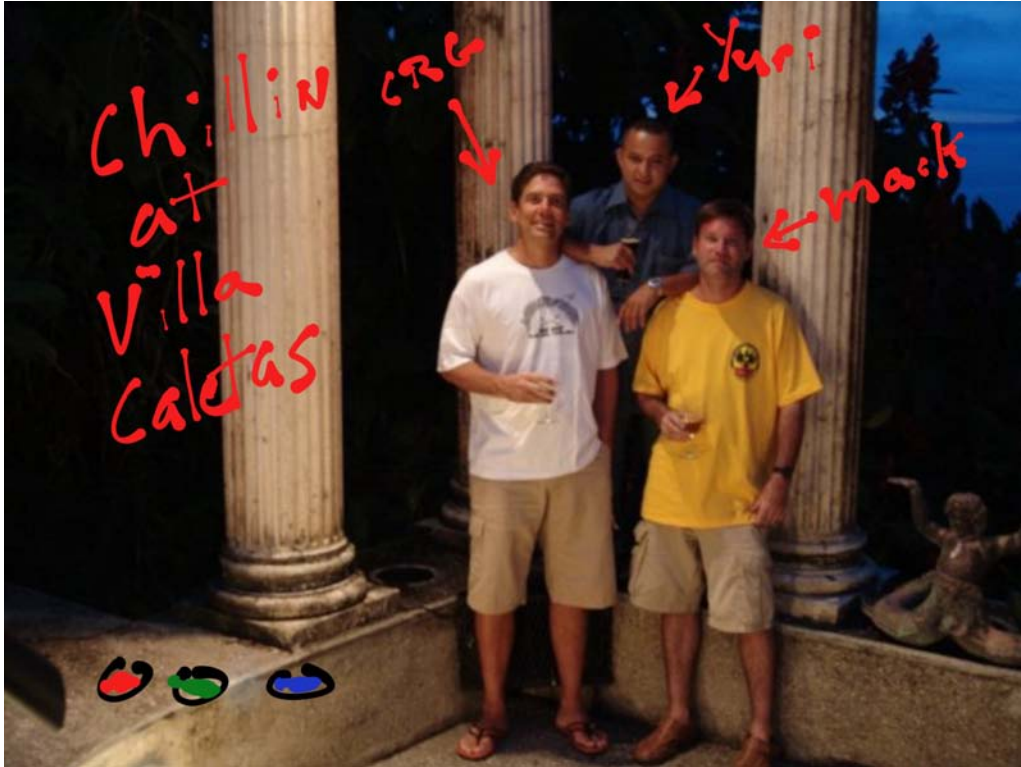




10 Cool Things  
to do in

Jaco





I am originally from Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. I don't know if maybe you've heard of that place, or have even visited. It is known for its tackiness and ultra-extreme level of commercialization (see my [Colossal Crab](#) post). And Jaco is often referred to (at least by those in the "know") as the Myrtle Beach of Costa Rica, albeit with a more tropical tacky flare.

But the fact is that Jaco is loaded with cool things to do. For many who come to Costa Rica in search of the perfect party, outside of gringo gulch in San Jose, Jaco is their only experience of the country. That's sad. But, hey, they're having the time of their lives, so who am I to judge? I myself have my share of sordid Jaco party stories.

So, enjoy this cool list of 10 ultra-cool things to do in Jaco...

### **Cool Thing #1: Take the Aerial Tram tour**

This is a great way to see the rain-forest canopy up close and personal, without getting your shoes dirty. The guides are very informative as well. The company that operates this tour (Rain Forest Adventures), also has one in Braulio Carrillo National Park. They are top notch and have been entertaining and teaching tourists about the marvels of the rain forest for many years. This is a great and educational option for the kids. Don't freak, the adult stuff appears below.

[Rain Forest Adventures Pacific Aerial Tram](#)

### **Cool Thing #2: Watch a sunset at Villa Caletas**

Perched high on a cliff with immaculate views and appointments, this place is one of the most unique boutique hotels the country has to offer. Romance at the extreme end. One thing



super cool is the Greek-style mini-amphitheater complete with doric (or is it ionic?) columns. This is where the crowd gathers on each clear evening to imbibe while taking in a glorious sunset.

[Villa Caletas Photos](#)

### **Cool Thing #3: Go hiking in Carara National Park**

Just beyond the famed Tarcoles Bridge, or the "crocodile bridge" as it is often referred, is the Carara National Park. Carara is most noted for the enormous crocodiles that inhabit the Tarcoles River (one of the dirtiest in Central America). Despite the pollution that exists in that river (which is formed as two large rivers that run through the heart of San Jose converge), the park is teeming with flora and fauna. Most notable are the Scarlet Macaws that have made a remarkable come back after nearly disappearing from the park a decade ago.

[Carara National Park](#)

### **Cool Thing #4: Surfing at Playa Hermosa**

One word comes to mind when I think of the waves at Hermosa Beach (the one that is right next door to Jaco)....powerful. Well, also fast. Hermosa is home to one of the best and most consistent waves in Costa Rica and the place is a surfing mecca. But be careful, on a large day those waves can easily snap your board (as well as your spine) in two.

### **Cool Thing #5: Eat a fish taco by the beach at Bohio Grill**

This is a tradition for me every time I pass through Jaco. Now that I have gotten older (and calmer) Jaco really is not my kind of town. So I generally just pass through. But one place I do stop is Bohio, a little bar/restaurant right on the beach. Why? Because I love to take in the sites while drinking a cold Imperial and munching on their delicious and healthy fish tacos.

### **Cool Thing #6: Experience the crocodile man tour**

This is cool if you like to see a man feeding a real live monster. Something to do and there's nothing cooler than a croc...at least at a safe distance. Well, for these guys, "safe distance" means quite a different thing than for you or me. And these aren't zoo crocs...these are live in the jungle and eat your ass crocs!

[Crocodile Man Tour Jaco](#)

### **Cool Thing #7: Hike to a waterfall**

Okay, so you came to Costa Rica to party and the only real "wildlife" you want to see is what hangs out at the Monkey Bar after midnight. But don't you at least want to get in one good waterfall, at least to have something wholesome to tell the wife and kids about? Well, this is it. The Pura Vida Gardens and Waterfalls are just outside of Jaco and offer an easy hike to a beautiful set of falls.

[Pura Vida Gardens and Waterfalls](#)

### **Cool Thing #8: Fishing from Los Sueños Marina**

For years Costa Rica only had one marina...the one at Los Sueños. Well, that has changed now, but this one still stands as probably the nicest and highest class marina in the country. And like many areas of Costa Rica, the fishing off the coast is spectacular.

[Los Sueños Marina](#)

### **Cool Thing #9: Golf at Los Sueños Resort**

Los Sueños is also home to one of the country's finest 18-hole championship courses. You see this is why Jaco is the place for the middle aged guy needing to re-sow some oats...great fishing and golf and party, party, party (then repeat cycle)...can it get any better? I know of many who would adamantly declare, HELL NO!

[La Iguana Golf Course at Los Sueños](#)

### **Cool Thing #10: Just party all night...hey, you're in Jaco!**

Okay I told you we would get to the adult stuff. Jaco is definitely known for its party atmosphere. From Wednesday to Sunday, the place never sleeps. The party will move from one bar to another as the night progresses, so you kinda need to know the ropes. Actually, Jaco has made an effort in the past few years to change its image to a "family beach" (hey, wouldn't you know it, Myrtle Beach has tried to do the same). But, don't worry, there is still plenty of party in Jaco.

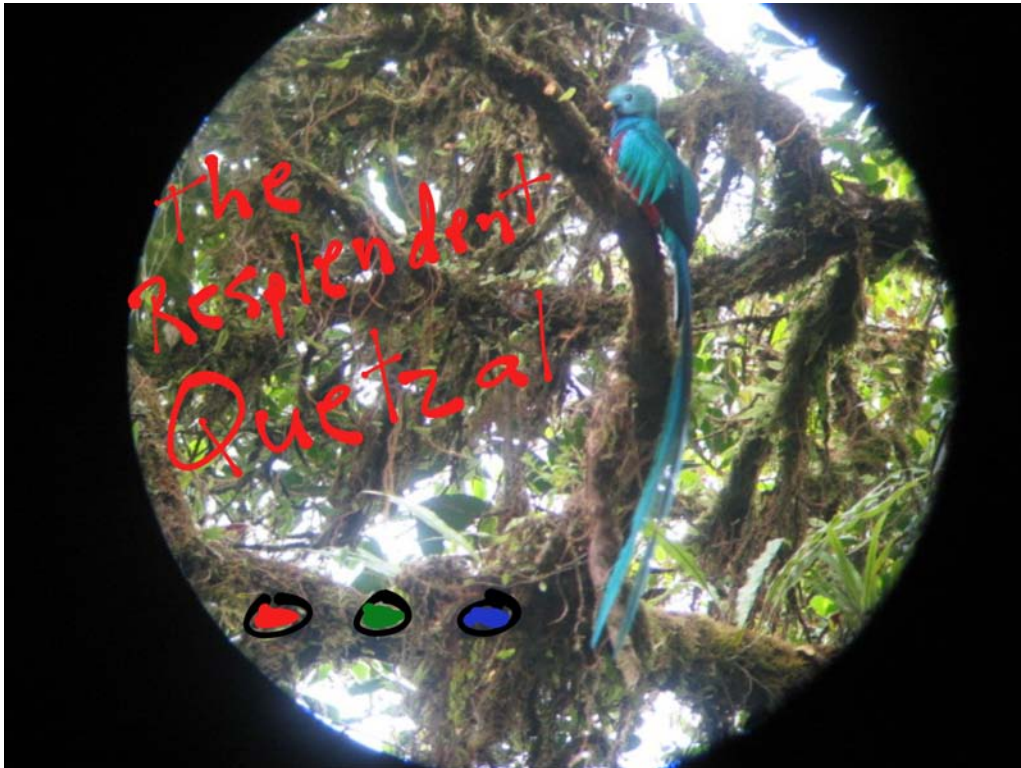
Remember, if you want to experience these cool things to do in Jaco, or any other place featured in this series, we have the custom [Costa Rica vacation package](#) for you.





# 10 Cool Things to do in Monteverde





Monteverde is one of the "crown-jewels" of Costa Rica tourism (the others being Arenal and Manuel Antonio). What makes it so popular? Mainly the cloud forest. What the heck is a "cloud forest", you ask? Well, a forest in the clouds, dummy. No, really it's a little more complicated than that.

True, the [cloud forest](#) exists at higher elevations, though not that high. Monteverde is 1,400 meters (or, 4600 feet) above sea level. For comparison purposes, San Jose is around 1,200 meters). So, yes it's up there, but not so much. It can't be that high, because if you get too much higher, there is not near the level of biodiversity that you find in a place like Monteverde. The Cloud Forest is wet most of the time as it is marked by persistent cloud, or fog, cover. So, bottom line is that lots of stuff grows and lives in all that vegetation. Monteverde has been called one of the most important Cloud Forest eco-systems in the world. New species are routinely discovered there and it is a prime laboratory for measuring the effects of global warming. So, enough scientific stuff. Let's get on to the cool stuff. Below are 10 of my personal favorite cool things to do in Monteverde.

### **Cool Thing #1: Take a guided day tour of the Cloud Forest Reserve**

Okay I've already given my pseudo-scientific explanation of what a cloud forest is. What it does is supply a home to 2,500 plant species (including the most orchid species in a single place), 100 species of mammals, 400 bird species, 120 reptilian and amphibian species, and thousands of insects. The best way to experience it is a tour with a naturalist guide. They will show you things you would never know were there. You can hire one right at the entrance, where you pay to get in. The experience is priceless, so stop worrying about what it costs...not that much....do it!

## **Cool Thing #2: Take a guided "night" tour of the Cloud Forest Reserve**

A day tour is a must do, but a night tour is really cool too. Many of the animals in the cloud forest are nocturnal. To see them, you need to go a night. Watch out for the vampire bats!

## **Cool Thing #3: Getting there by Van and Boat (throw in a horse)**

The road to Monteverde is one of Costa Rica's most famous (or infamous) bad roads. It is not as bad these days as it used to be, but I believe you can still buy a t-shirt that says "I survived the road to Monteverde" as a souvenir of your visit. On many of our [vacation designs](#), one will go from San Jose to Arenal, then to Monteverde. That is a very common tourist route. And the best way to get there is the so-called "van boat" transfer. The distance between the two places is not that great. Problem is that Lake Arenal, Costa Rica's largest, stands between. So some smart person crafted the idea of the van boat transfer. It is the quickest and most scenic way to get there (2.5 hours versus twice that amount of time to drive around the lake and then up the mountain). They can even throw in a horse ride leg if you want.

[Van Boat Transfer/Tour with Desafio](#)

## **Cool Thing #4: Visit the "farms" (frogs and snakes)**

These are basically two buildings that are full of, guess what, frogs and snakes. Many of these guys, especially the snakes, you probably would not want to encounter on your guided walk through the forest. But here at the "farms" you get your chance to see what is really out there. I believe the technical term is "serpentarium," at least for the snake one. But there is no such thing as a frogatarium, is there? I prefer to just say farms. There are also places nearby featuring insects, bats, and butterflies. Great stops for the kids.

## **Cool Thing #5: Visit the Art House**

The Art House is a cooperative where many local artists sell their cool stuff. You will find some really unique pieces there. There usually is some local artist putting on an exhibit as well. It provides a boost to the local art scene, one of things that makes Monteverde so cool!

[Monteverde Art House Website](#)

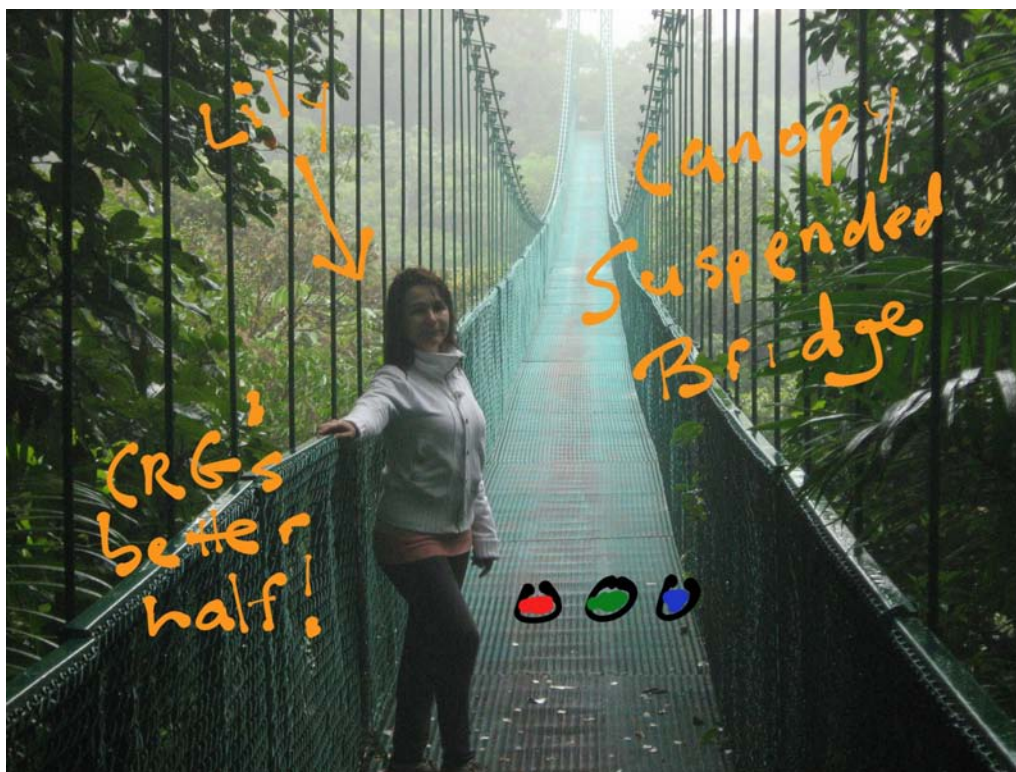
## **Cool Thing #6: Eat at the Tree House Restaurant**

This is my favorite restaurant in the area. It gets the name because right in the middle is a huge tree. Food is great. It is right in the center of town....you can't miss it.

[Tree House Restaurant](#)

## **Cool Thing #7: Do the Selvatura Canopy Tour and Tree Top Walk**

We regard Selvatura as having one of the truly premier canopy (or, "zip-line") tours in Costa



Rica. What is a canopy tour? It consists of cable from one tree to another. And you go zipping across them at very high speeds. Not the best way to "see" the forest (do that on the guided tour), but a real hoot. How do you stop? Well, with that leather glove on your hand of course. The tree top walk is a suspended bridges walk in the cloud forest canopy. Selvatura has some other cool stuff as well, like the insect museum.

[Selvatura Park website](#)

### **Cool Thing #8: Ice Cream at the Monteverde Cheese Factory**

Monteverde was founded by the Quakers who came to escape becoming conscripts in the Korean war. They were dairy farmers so they did what came natural. They built a cheese factory. Nowadays that factory is one of the largest producers of dairy products in the country. And you can visit the factory and taste some of their delicious ice cream, while learning a little history of the Quaker founding of Monteverde and the Cloud Forest Reserve. That makes the Quakers a really cool bunch!

[Monteverde Cheese Factory tour website](#)

### **Cool Thing #9: Buy cool handmade stuff at the Artesenia Ecuatoriana**

This is a little place (not sure of the actual name, or even if there is one) where a family from Ecuador sells all kinds of cool handmade stuff from their homeland. I just love it and the stuff they have is very unique and authentic. I stop by every time I am there.

## **Cool Thing #10: Visit other area nature reserves**

The most famous is the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve. However, in the area you will also find some other important ones. These include the Santa Elena Reserve and the Children's Eternal Rain Forest. All are certainly worth a visit and in doing so you will be helping to preserve these vitally important eco-systems.

[Children's Eternal Rainforest website](#)

[Santa Elena Cloud Forest Reserve website](#)

Monteverde certainly deserves its place as one of Costa Rica's crown jewels. Admittedly, it has become more and more commercialized over the years, but still retains its tico-quaker cultural quaintness to a large degree. But the naturalist guides will tell you that things are changing in the forest and not for the better. Global warming is indeed taking its toll primarily reflected in gradual species reduction. We need to protect Monteverde and places like it before it is too late. Your involvement can help greatly.



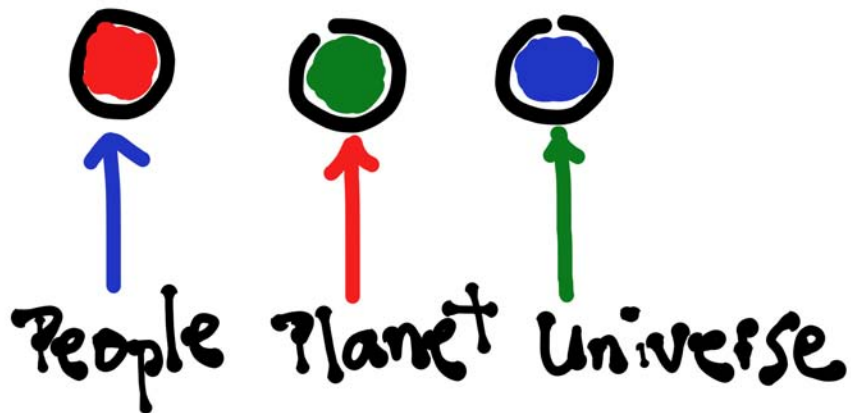


What's up with  
the



you ask?

# My 3 dots...



**Red Dot** = people. After all, my blog has had a lot to say about them. Sometimes not too flattering. Nevertheless, I do believe that people are important, especially since I happen to be one of them. Much more so than the stuff we tend to elevate above them.

**Green Dot** = planet. This Costa Rica Guy is really into sustainability, which I have arrogantly defined for myself as managing our impacts so as to facilitate ecological endurance. It is my belief that centuries of non-sustainable thinking and acting has put the first dot in jeopardy of being erased.

**Blue Dot** = universe (or universal glue). On some level that I could never hope to completely fathom, we are all bound together by this thing we refer to as the Universe. I can best symbolize it by a blue dot, which is what you would see if you looked down upon us from space and it also the color I see when I look up on a clear day from my humble home here in Perez Zeledon, Costa Rica.

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