

Osa Peninsula Trip Info, May 2007

About the Osa Peninsula

The Osa Peninsula (the Osa) lies in the Southwestern part of Costa Rica near the border of Panama. The Osa holds the last remaining large tract of Pacific lowland rainforest in all of Central America. The area's remoteness and uniqueness is responsible for its high degree of species endemism. It also holds a high number of South American species, hundreds of miles away from their known ranges. The forests of the Osa are largely intact and continuous, allowing them to serve as a comparative study area for rainforests and tropical ecosystems. It is considered one of the more remote parts of Costa Rica even by Tico (native Costa Ricans) standards. In contrast, most casual visitors to Costa Rica commonly visit the more accessible parks north of the capital (San Jose). This has helped to limit the human impact on the Osa.

The Area Conservacion de Osa (ACOSA), which encompasses the entire Pacific lowlands of Costa Rica, and includes the peninsula, contains 38 different ecosystems^[1]. Thirteen of these ecosystems are found within Corcovado National Park (CNP), nestled on the southwestern edge of the peninsula. The large tracts of undisturbed rain forest (primary) as well as secondary growth allows large neo-tropical mammals such as Jaguar (*Panthera onca*), Baird's Tapir (*Tapirus bairdii*), white-lipped peccaries (*Tayassu pecari*) and the Central American squirrel monkey (*Siamiri oerstedii*) to maintain significant populations here. In addition to mammals, several bird species have significant populations on the Osa, such as the Scarlet Macaw (affectionately referred to as red pigeons), the largest populations in all of Costa Rica. The Osa also holds large populations of reptiles and amphibians, including maybe the largest population of American crocodiles (*Crocodylus acutus*). It is also home to the extremely rare black-headed bushmaster (*Lachesis melanocephala*). Biologists estimate that there are as many as 10,000 species of insects on the Osa along with over 2000 species of plants, 140 species of mammals, 350 species of birds and nearly 120 species of reptiles and amphibians. The high rainfall on the Osa leads to a high diversity of plant species. Many species of trees on the Osa exceed 50 meters in height, with one member of the Genus *Ceiba* exceeding 80 meters!

Guidelines for Observing Wildlife in Costa Rica

The following rules were adopted for the national park system in Costa Rica, but are applicable to other areas as well. Most of the lands of the Osa, public and private are part of the Golfo Dulce Forest Reserve. The laws specifically prohibit the following activities within national parks:

- ❑ Cutting trees and removing plants, or any other forest product. Hunting or capturing wild animals, collecting or extracting any of their products or parts.
- ❑ Hunting sea turtles of any species, collecting or removing their eggs or any other products.

- ❑ Scratching, marking, staining, or causing any other damage to plants, equipment or facilities.
- ❑ Engaging in sport, industrial or small-scale fishing.
- ❑ Collecting or removing corals, shells, rocks, or any other marine product.
- ❑ Collecting or removing mineral rocks, fossils or any other geological product.
- ❑ Carrying guns, harpoons or any other instrument that can be used as a hunting weapon.
- ❑ Introducing exotic animals or plants.
- ❑ Causing any type of environmental pollution.
- ❑ Removing stones, sand, gravel or similar products.
- ❑ Feeding animals.

The “Management and Development Plan of Corcovado National Park” (1988) further sets forth the following protection methods and guidelines:

In the park, it is prohibited to cut trees, extract plants or any other plant product; hunt or capture marine, riverine or terrestrial wildlife or collect any of their products or wastes, collect or extract objects of historical or archaeological interest; introduce plants or domestic or exotic animals, land on beaches without a permit or fly over the area at low altitude; take stones or sand, cause fires.

Trip Description

The trip is scheduled to spend the first and last nights in San Jose and visit 2 separate and unique Rainforest lodges on the Osa Peninsula. We are using these lodges as our main bases, and will do hikes based from there. The one exception is on day 4, when we will hike across the heart of the peninsula, through remote primary forest, from Rio Tigre Lodge, to Carate-a small, former gold mining village, and end of the road on the way to Corcovado National Park. This hike is about 10miles in length.

Rio Tigre Lodge is where we will spend our first 2 nights on the Osa located on the Tigre River just outside the small town of Dos Brazos on the Peninsula de Osa. This remote location in the Reserva Forestal Golfo Dulce surrounding Corcovado National Park is a 31 acre private wildlife reserve, which is connected to several other private reserves, includes both secondary and primary forest, numerous trails, creeks and lagoons, a refreshing 50 foot waterfall and a collection of local orchids. Living in the sanctuary are three types of cats, Pizotes, Tayras, poison dart frogs, monkeys and an abundance of birds. It is only a thirty-minute ride (if the road is good) out of Puerto Jimenez, and provides a perfect starting point for the trip. Located higher up in the hills, it allows one to venture deeper into the interior of the peninsula, where areas are penetrable only by foot or horseback. The lodge itself is completely surrounded by primary and secondary forest.

There is a diverse array of flora and fauna to observe at Rio Tigre including, tropical cockroaches (cucurachas), jaguar, poison dart frogs (rana venenosa), rare hummingbirds, fer-de-lance snakes (terciopelo), eyelash vipers (Bocaraca), macaws (lapas), parrots, morpho butterflies, sloths (perezoso), and tapirs (Danta) to name just a few. We will spend our second 2 nights at Terrapin lodge, located on the Pacific Coast. The forests surrounding Terrapin

Lodge hold a wide array of herpetofauna, especially frogs! Terrapin is perfectly situated adjacent to the Laguna Pejeperrito, a coastal freshwater lagoon. We will be able to kayak in the lagoon, which is home to approximately 40+ adult and sub-adult American crocodiles. Occasionally there are sea turtles (usually Olive Ridley) nesting on the beach. Our last 2 nights will be spent at Bosque Verde. Bosque consists of 60 hectares of mixed habitat: primary and secondary forest, streams, and pasture lands. Frequently encountered wildlife on the property include the four species of monkeys, scarlet macaws, coatis, river otters, caimans and even peccaries. With luck, you may see one of the wild cats or tapirs, tracks of which are spotted with regularity on the property. There are several small ponds on the property, which are superb for night-time wildlife viewing. Caimans are frequent visitors, along with an array of amphibians and nocturnal mammals.

Tentative Itinerary

Day 1 (Wednesday May 30th):

Arrive San Jose, Costa Rica. Transfer to Hotel Don Carlos in the historic Barrio Amon district of San Jose. Afternoon in San Jose taking in the amazing sites of a Latin American capital. Change U.S. dollars to Colones if needed, access the internet, use ATM's, etc.

Day 2 (Thursday, May 31st):

Morning: Breakfast at Hotel. Morning Flight to Puerto Jimenez, Osa Peninsula. Meet with Guide, Mike Boston.

Afternoon: Lunch in Puerto Jimenez at the Gringo hangout Carolinas. After lunch depart via private taxi for the 30-minute ride to the access road to Rio Tigre Lodge. Settle in and get acquainted with the grounds.

Evening: Hike trail for reptiles, amphibians and nocturnal tropical mammals. Get familiar with trails at Rio Tigre. Overnight at Rio Tigre Lodge.

Day 3 (Friday, June 1st):

Morning: General Tropical Ecology Hike to become familiar with various types of forest and trails around Rio Tigre. Pass through various stages of forest progression from primary forest and secondary growth forest. Mornings are good to for spotting diurnal species out hunting (Cribo, *Spilotes*, Neo-tropical bird snakes, etc.) and basking vipers (terciopelo along streams).

Afternoon: Hike through Rio Tigre forests. Observe unique stages of forest growth, such as epiphytic plant succession on host species, bromeliads, orchids, heliconias, anthurium. Search Heliconia leaf curls for bats and frogs. Possibly observe peccaries, tapirs or cats in higher elevations.

Evening: Hike around Rio Tigre road to search for reptiles and amphibians. Species found may include: The green and black dart frog, *Dendrobates auratus*, Terciopelo, *Bothrops asper*, Eye-lash viper, *Bothriechis schlegeli*, Common Boa, *Boa constrictor*, Tree Boa, *Corallus hortulanus*, Red-eyed tree frog, *Agalychnis callidryas*. If time permits, hike to remote areas where Abraham has spotted **matabuey** (Bushmaster). Overnight at Rio Tigre Lodge.

Day 4 (Saturday, June 2nd):

Morning: Hike from Rio Tigre Lodge, up into the interior hills of the Osa, and then turning South toward the gold mining village of Piedras Blancas, following the Rio Carate to the Pacific Coast towards Carate arriving at Terrapin Lodge. Hike will pass through several eco-systems in the remote interior of the peninsula. This hike is ~12 miles and will take approximately 6-8 hours. BE PREPARED TO BE HOT AND SOAKED, as we will be crossing streams.

Afternoon: Free to relax and settle in at Terrapin Lodge.

Evening: Hike down to Laguna Pejeperrito to observe American crocodile and perform survey for Costa Rica Osa Peninsula Crocodiles Survey via kayak. Possibly hike beach for signs of nesting sea turtles and prowling jaguar. Observe fishing bat foraging behavior along shores of Laguna Pejeperrito.

Day 5 (Sunday June 3rd):

Morning: Herpetology hike along the streams or possibly exploring one of Terrapin Lodge's trails.

Afternoon: Hike or hit the beach. Possibly Kayak in the lagoon. Carate beach has the largest concentration of Scarlet Macaws in Costa Rica!

Evening: Night hike along the beach to possibly spot a nesting sea-turtle (we saw an Olive Riddley in August 2005) and spot crocs in the lagoon via eye-shine. Past trips have found Milk tree-frogs, tamandua (vested anteater), cat-eyed snakes and *Smilisca* tree-frogs as well as fishing bats in the lagoon, and numerous crocodiles!

Day 6 (Monday, June 4th):

Morning: Breakfast at Terrapin Lodge. Take Colectivo for short 45 minute ride to Bosque Verde. Settle in.

Afternoon: Hike or hit the beach. Possibly Kayak in the Pejeperro

Evening: Night hike along the beach to possibly spot a nesting sea-turtle, big cat or spot crocs in the lagoon via eye-shine.

Day 7 (Tuesday, June 5th)

Morning: Hike to vista through primary forest.

Afternoon: Afternoon to free to explore or hit the beach or kayak in the lagoon

Evening: Night hike along the beach to possibly spot a nesting sea-turtle, big cat or spot crocs in the lagoon via eye-shine. Possibly hike trails in the hills for snakes, scour forest debris for coral snakes.

Day 8 (Wednesday June 6th)

Breakfast at Bosque Verde. Morning return to Puerto Jimenez. Lunch in Puerto Jimenez before Mid-morning or Afternoon flight to San Jose and transfer to Hotel. Possibly visit serpentarium or INBIOparque, if time allows. Afternoon to shop downtown.

Day 9 (Thursday June 7th) Morning departure back to U.S.

What's included in the Total Cost?

It's easier to say what's not: Departure tax (\$26), meals in San Jose (which are very very cheap, about 4 U.S. dollars gets you a huge meal!), personal items (souvenirs, water, film, etc.) and tips. Basically everything of a group nature is included.

Total cost (not including Airfare from U.S. to San Jose) will vary depending on how many individuals choose to travel with us and current airfares. Should more persons wish to participate, the price will go down. To give you an idea, the table below breaks down the prices:

Cost: \$1250 (based on 3ppl), \$1195(4ppl), \$1145(5ppl), \$1075 (6ppl), \$1050(8ppl)

Traveling to Costa Rica

Airfares currently have been running from \$450 to \$600 from NYC to San Jose, Costa Rica and roughly \$300 to \$350 from Miami. At certain times (in the rainy season from August-October), fare wars will drop prices down to \$250. The best connections are typically, American Airlines through Miami or Continental (either direct or through Houston). The airport code for San Jose's Juan Santamaria International Airport is **SJO**. We do not make your international reservations, but will assist you in finding the best fares. Upon finalizing the dates/itinerary, we will inform you of what times to arrive in San Jose. From there, you will be met and taken via taxi to the hotel.

Important Notes:

A passport is required for entry into Costa Rica. Apply right away if you do not have one. Normally they run around \$80 and take 4-6 weeks to arrive. Expedited passports can be obtained in person by applying at a US passport agency (e.g., Norwalk, CT) and cost \$145. Visas are not necessary. Have a good copy of your birth certificate with you.

Carry on your passport, money, your toothbrush, and a change of clothes, just in case your luggage gets lost, delayed or misdirected. Some tour members have made it a habit of also having a photo copy of all important documents as a back-up. It's also advisable to carry on your film and have it hand checked by security. While in flight, we will fill out the customs declaration and immigration forms provided by the airline staff. Upon arrival, we will first pass through immigration, where your passport will be checked and stamped. We then proceed downstairs to the baggage area and will claim your baggage at the carousel. I will meet you in this area. At Customs, an official will direct you to which line to go through. Incoming tourists usually pass through rather quickly. Once in Costa Rica, there is no longer any need to hurry and the airport is small, and less crowded than U.S. airports. In addition, Costa Rican customs officials (and the Ticos in general) tend to be more polite than U.S. Customs. Upon passing customs, you will exit outside and be overwhelmed by the number of taxi drivers awaiting your business. We will have one or two vans waiting for us to take us to the Hotel Don Carlos in downtown San Jose.

What to Expect Once We Arrive

San Jose

San Jose is relatively safe and not much different than any major U.S. city. The basic rule is keep your money in a secure money belt or travel pouch and always venture out with another person. The area where our hotel is located is very safe and a few blocks from the Pedestrian Mall with many shops and restaurants. There is a small park nearby as well.

Money.

There are banks close by. We'll go exchange there, though the hotel has exchange of smaller amounts (up to ~\$100). The currency of Costa Rica is the Colon. Current exchange rate is around 500 colones to the dollar. Meals are relatively cheap in San Jose. \$300 may be sufficient for spending money, but can vary depending on how many souvenirs/gifts you intend to purchase.

Food

There are McDs, KFC's and even a Papa John's Pizza, but I prefer the local fare. If you wish, we will take you to a good restaurant downtown with excellent wood-roasted chicken, gallo pinto, seafood dishes and more. Food is safe to eat. The water is considered perfectly safe, but if you feel better drinking bottled water, it is widely available. We can visit a San Jose grocery store, if you wish to pick up any necessities or personal items.

Climate

The tropics are very warm and humid. While probably hotter than most people are used to, it will not be as bad as you think. Temps are typically low 80s and 80-100% humidity, but being near the ocean, it will be slightly cooler due to breezes. San Jose at its higher elevation is a bit cooler and dryer, but still comfortable in shorts. At night, it may be cool enough to wear light pants. Corcovado National Park receives between 3 to 4 meters of rain annually. The wettest months are September and October, with up to 12 inches of rain falling in a few hours. The highest elevations in the interior of the peninsula (Cerro Rincon at 745m) may receive up to 6 meters of rain annually.

Insects and Arachnids

Mosquitoes are present, but not usually a bother in April. Malaria is virtually non-existent on the Osa, but if you feel more secure taken malaria pills prophylactically (See your physician). No other inoculations are required, but you can check out the www.cdc.gov website for recommended inoculations. Repellents with DEET work well, but many prefer citronella-based or eucalyptus based repellents as they are derived from natural products. Citronella however, contains a compound, citral, that is a pheromone of stingless-bees, which are present on the peninsula, and they may end up buzzing around your head. We have yet to find them a problem. (Interestingly, and just one of the many fascinating behaviors we may witness, the pheromone is emitted by different species of stingless bees to confuse other species of stingless bees, whose hive is about to be raided).

Most individuals, regardless of repellents, will probably end up dealing with a few chiggers, and/or ticks. Some people never find them to be a problem, while others seem to get chiggers on each trip. Chiggers are a mite that takes a meal under the skin then leaves a small tube where it had been feeding. Chigger bites resemble small pimples, and they itch. One trip, Kenny and his wife got chiggers while a fellow traveler that went to the same forests, the same places came back chigger free. Many travelers with us wear a chigger bite as a badge of honor. Chiggers do not breed on humans, and the bites disappear in a few days after your return. Skin ointments recommended by your physician can relieve the itching.

Venomous snakes

There is a high probability that we will see several venomous snake species. Common sense and careful listening to the tour guides will make uncomfortably close encounters a rare occurrence. The guides have experience in identifying not only the species, but the areas where such species may occur. One should never walk day or night bare foot, or without above the ankle foot/leg protection. Good boots will work fine. Grabbing tree branches before looking is discouraged. Venomous snakes are part of the overall ecosystem in Costa Rica, and can be some of the most beautiful of the vertebrates we may encounter.

Accommodations on the Osa Peninsula

Sirena

Sirena facilities are dormitory style bunks. You will need a set of sheets and pillow-a small travel pillow works well. Each dorm area has a set of 8-10 bunks, each with a bathroom and shower at each end. While they are rustic, the bunks are pretty comfortable. IF you are expecting a 4-star hotel, you should think twice about this trip. Sirena is more like summer-camp, than an eco-lodge. It is common to have giant cockroaches crawling around the bunks/floors and walls. In fact, *Smilisca* tree frogs will even land on your face occasionally! There is limited electricity at Sirena for recharging camera batteries.

El Remanso

This is a top-notch, comfortable rainforest lodge. They have a single large 2-story rancho which can sleep 8 persons comfortably, and several private cabinas. Depending on the number of singles and/or couples, we will assign persons lodging once we arrive at El Remanso. We will be served 3 delicious meals a day. In addition, they have a bar where alcoholic drinks may be purchased. Alcoholic drinks are not included in the cost and they will keep track of what you consume on an honor system and you will pay prior to departure.

www.elremanso.com

Terrapin Lodge

This is a comfortable rainforest lodge for the economic traveler. They have several private cabinas made from native woods. Each cabina is screened for mosquito protection, and has a private shower/bath. Depending on the number of participants, anywhere from 2-4 persons may share a cabina. A single open-air rancho is available for dining.

<http://www.terrapinlodge.com/index.htm>

Rio Tigre Lodge

This is a comfortable, rustic rainforest lodge. They have one main 2-story lodge, with several rooms and a shared bath. <http://www.osaadventures.com/overview.htm>.

Rio Nuevo Tent Camp Lodge

This is a true rustic rainforest lodge. Accomodations are platform tents, each with a large roof overhead to protect from drenching tropical rains. A central bath/shower area is available. This is one of the more remote rainforest lodges, being located high up on a ridge between two streams. It is also one of the only lodges on the Osa to be owned by Ticos (native Costa Ricans). A huge open air rancho is where meals are served and a large hammock allows for afternoon Siestas.

Bosque Verde

Bosque Verde boasts quaint, clean accommodations. Each cabin also has a private bath with running water, which originates from a natural spring on the property.

Attire/Gear

On the Osa you will only need shorts and t-shirts. Typically, while hiking you will be wet because either: a) It is hot; b) It is raining or c) we are swimming! Take several pairs of shorts (3-4), t-shirts (3-4) and socks (4-5 pairs). A good pair of hiking boots is essential as is a pair of sandals for lounging around. River shoes for river hikes and wearing in the shower are nice to have as well. One clean set of clothes in a zip lock plastic bag for your return to the U.S. is well worth the effort. We will leave some luggage in San Jose at the hotel where it will be locked until our return. You can leave a clean set of clothes there for the return flight.

Remember to try to limit your luggage to 25 lbs. If you have more than this, most likely you are over-packed! The regional airlines will charge you (about 30 cents/lb) for bags over 25 lbs. In addition, although 25 lbs doesn't seem like much to hike with, the heat and humidity do take enough out of you that you want to carry as little weight as possible. We will email you a more detailed gear list prior to departure.

Medications and other Health Concerns

Take the basics: Aspirin or Ibuprofen, Antacids, Pepto-Bismol tablets, etc. Please let us know if you are on any prescription medications (Pain-killers, blood-pressure meds, anti-depressants, ANYTHING!). With the hot-humid conditions, we must know any existing medical conditions you may have, in case you have discomfort during the hikes. We can arrange for a Medi-vac flight to the local hospital if necessary. There is a minimal risk for contracting diseases in Costa Rica, and as mentioned earlier, Malaria is rare on the Osa. However, there are diseases unique to these tropical areas. The Center for Disease Control's website does provide info on any health concerns. Talk to your family physician for any issues that may be a specific concern.

Those are some of the basics! If you have any questions, feel free to contact either of us below:

Matt Harris at Mharris@Matabuey.com, phone: 845-231-4298.

References

We can provide a list of past participants should you wish to contact them with questions!

Recommended Reading List:

- [1] Government of Costa Rica, “World Heritage Report: Nomination Of Corcovado National Park And Caño Island Biological Reserve For Inclusion In The World Heritage Site List Under The World Heritage Site Convention”, February 2003
- [2] Kappelle, Maarten, Marco Castro, Neiner Acevedo, Luis Gonzalez, Huberth Monge, Ecosystems of the Osa Conservation Area, Instituto Nacional de Biodiversidad (INBIO), Santo Domingo de Heredia, 2002.
- [3] Savage, Jay M. The Amphibians and Reptiles of Costa Rica: A Herpetofauna between Two Continents, between Two Seas, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2002.
- [4] Leenders, Twan, A Guide to Amphibians and Reptiles of Costa Rica, Zona Tropical, Miami, FL, 2001.
- [5] Wallace, David Rains, The Quetzal and The Macaw, Random House, Inc., May 1992.
- [6] Janzen, D.H. (ed.) 1983. Costa Rican Natural History. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- [7] Weber, Anton, et al, An Introductory Field Guide to the Flowering Plants of the Golfo Dulce Rain Forests, Costa Rica: Corcovado National Park and Piedras Blancas National Park, Instituto Nacional de Biodiversidad (INBIO), Santo Domingo de Heredia, November 2001.
- [8] Forsyth, Adrian, *Tropical Nature*, 1984.