

# Cruising To Adventure

by Ellen Sarbone

***If Eden was Paradise, then Costa Rica is "Pura Vida!" (Pure Life). Imagine a small country, about the size of West Virginia, sandwiched between the Pacific Ocean, the Caribbean, Nicaragua and Panama.***

Picture a country which is rich in natural beauty, full of fascinating wildlife, has near-perfect, tropical weather, excellent accommodations and numerous exciting adventure options, and you'll only scratch the surface of the attractions in Costa Rica.

Single travelers find Costa Rica a perfect destination which combines the safety of home (unlike other countries in Latin America,) with the scenery and ebullience of Central America. It is easy to find a local tour group; much of the population speaks English quite well; prices are very reasonable; food is excellent; water is safe to drink; and the transportation system and roads are good. And nine airlines fly from the U.S. to San Jose, so it's easy to get there.

Costa Rica forms a biological and geographical bridge between North and South America. As a result, it contains an incredible diversity of plant and animal life and a constant flow of migrating birds. For example, the amazing rainforests support more species of birds than all of the U.S. and Canada. When Columbus sailed down the lush eastern coast, he named it the "Rich Coast," assuming it would be rich

in gold. But, the Indians had already mined most of the gold. So Costa Rica remained comparatively isolated and sparsely populated for 400 years. In spite of its location between two countries with long histories of political upheaval, it developed an agricultural society whose democracy has remained stable. The country is so peace-loving that its army was abolished long ago!

Once you decide to go to Costa Rica, the tough choice will be which of the myriad natural attractions to visit and which of the many tour companies to use. Some people make the capital, San Jose, the base of operations, taking one- or two-day trips to many of the National Parks. Probably the consummate way to experience the splendors of Costa Rica's major national parks in the shortest

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amount of time, with the greatest comfort and luxury is to take a six night cruise on the M/V Tempress. November through May is considered the "dry" season and the ship explores the southern area along the Gulf of Nicoya and into the Pacific. Between June and October, the Tempress has other routs.

Tomas Pozuelo, Vice President of Cruceros del Sur, the ship's owner, wanted to offer visitors a Costa Rican perspective of his country and to combine sightseeing and adventure with sports activities and leisure time on beautiful beaches while pampering passengers and providing first-rate cuisine. His dream has been successfully executed in the well-equipped, modern,

174-foot ship that accommodates up to 62 passengers in roomy, air-conditioned cabins and offers a helpful and congenial Costa Rican crew that includes a naturalist guide, biologist, and dive-master. They all exude a genuine love for their country and an infectious "joie de vivre."

Each day brings a choice of easy or more strenuous nature hikes. An elaborate buffet lunch is served on a long, white sand beach. There's time for swimming, snorkeling, horseback riding, kayaking or sunbathing. Certified divers are excited by the unusual species they encounter during their underwater sorties. Evening activities depend on the ship's location - a beach bonfire party, a slide show, nature talk or video in the main deck lounge. Those with energy left at the end of the day can go dancing.

We developed a strong understanding for the cultural and natural gifts of Costa Rica during a wonderful week aboard the Tempress. One day our group explored lowland habitats of Tropical Dry Forest and Mangrove ecosystems in Palo Verde Nat'l Park on a three-hour excursion up the Tempisque River in small boats, viewing migratory birds and lunching ashore, at Rancho Humo. The other group opted to visit pre-Columbian Indian burial grounds and lunch at a campesino farm on Chira Island. Another day we visited Manuel Antonio Nat'l Park with its three splendid beaches separated by ever-green forests growing down to the shore and its resident sloths, coatimundis and howler monkeys. Both guides were excellent at discovering the hard-to-see inhabitants in the park. We sloshed through the virgin Tropical Wet Forest of a private reserve in Caletas the fourth morning and local school children entertained us aboard ship after we spent the afternoon at Drakes Bay. It was just one example of how Tempress owners involve local people in cultural exchange activities and help them benefit from tourism.

The high plateau rainforest of Corcovado National Park, covered by a canopy of 200 foot high trees is one of the last refuges for jaguars, and home to the country's largest population of the endangered Scarlet Macaws. We spent the last day at Cano Island, surrounded by a coral reef covered with mysterious perfectly round carved stones.

There was truly something for everyone on the Tempress cruise - romance for couples, new friends and companions for singles. When the crew bid us farewell, more than a few tears were shed. We all felt as though we had become part of a family that now was parting. Several people had already booked another trip. If you want to go, call your travel agent or Tempress Cruises at (800) 336-8423.



Photo by Ellen Sarbone