

CASA ROJA AND BOCA ORIENTATION GUIDE



Boca del Río Sierpe, Costa Rica

Welcome to Casa Roja and the Boca del Río Sierpe (the mouth of the snake river). We want your stay here to be as rewarding and safe as possible, so **please help us by taking a few minutes to familiarize yourself with your new environment upon arrival.** This guide is organized by Health and Safety, Guidelines and Tips Around the House, What to Do at Casa Roja and Beyond, and Osa Peninsula History and Wildlife.

**The Casa Roja WiFi password is “casaroja”
The Casa Playa WiFi is not password protected**

All photos taken by Casa Roja and FISHBIO friends and families.



Our Mission

Our team at Casa Roja has a deep love for Costa Rica and a long history of environmental research, education, and conservation. We see the lodge as a unique opportunity to introduce guests to the spectacular natural beauty of the Osa Peninsula, as well as the Sierpe River and its special mangrove forests. At the same time, we strive to support research, education, and conservation in the region by working with communities, universities, and environmental groups. We hope that more people sharing our love and appreciation for this incredible region will help support its preservation for generations to come.

The People and Dogs of the Boca

Argenis, Graciela, and Valentina live at Casa Playa and are here to help you. They will provide you a basic overview of the property on your first day, are always available to answer any questions you may have, and will work to ensure you have the best possible experience at Casa Roja. They will respect your privacy at the house, and will stop by in the mornings and evenings at pre-arranged times to help you plan your day. They will work with you to determine your desired level of assistance with meals and housekeeping. Use the two-way radio (or WhatsApp) to contact Argenis and Graciela if you need anything. **Call them immediately if there is a health concern, an animal in the house, or any other emergency.**

Argenis is originally from Guanacaste in the northwest of Costa Rica, but has lived around Sierpe for about 20 years. Before becoming the caretaker at Casa Roja, he worked with



horses on a number of fincas (ranches) in the area, and then in the tourism industry in Sierpe. He's incredibly apt at spotting wildlife, imitating the calls of animals found along the Río Sierpe, well known and respected locally, and knows the river like the back of his hand. His favorite things about the boca are the sun, sand, sea, and tranquility.



Graciela has spent her whole life in southern Costa Rica. Born in Golfito, she has lived and worked in San Vito, Drake and Sierpe before moving to the boca. She enjoys preparing and sharing the culinary delights that Costa Rica has to offer for guests. Graciela appreciates the uniqueness and natural beauty of the boca environment, loves the fact that there are more animals than people, and sees the boca as a place where the fast pace, stress and problems of the modern world matter very little.



Valentina lives at the boca with her parents, loves the ocean and playing in the waves on a surfboard! She gets particularly excited when families with children close to her own age come to visit, and delights in accompanying them on excursions, especially when watermelon, oranges and grapes are brought along as snacks. When there are no visitors at the boca, she enjoys horseback riding and playing games online.



Marvin is our nearest neighbor and he is enthusiastic about sharing the boca environment with you. He only speaks a little English, but he tries hard and loves to learn. He will be happy to show you how the locals fish, take you on a hike to the waterfall, walk you along the rocks to the beach at Playa Marvin, or accompany you to Playa Ganado. There are a number of hazards around the boca, and it is very helpful (and sometimes reassuring) to have Marvin nearby. Ask him to harvest and open a coconut for you or show you where the cacao beans grow!



Pelusa, Sophie, and TingTing are a few of the boca dogs. All of the dogs are friendly, but please let us know if you are uncomfortable around dogs. They help keep animals out of the house at night and help alert us to snakes on hikes. Consider them assets and encourage them to follow you when you wander from the house.



Health and Safety

A FIRST AID KIT IS LOCATED UNDER THE KITCHEN COUNTER, BY THE SINK.

Here you will also find insect repellent, tools, batteries, and various household items. If you are looking for anything, start by checking in the storage containers under the kitchen bar. There are also supplies in the bottom kitchen drawers. If you can't find what you need, ask Argenis or Graciela. If not found on site, they can arrange to have things delivered to Casa Roja, sometimes on the same day.



Always be aware of your surroundings. We don't want to scare you, but you are in the heart of the rainforest and encounters with potentially dangerous animals are a possibility. Crocodiles have been spotted on the beach and are common in the Sierpe River, mangroves, boca, and ocean. Poisonous snakes have been found on the property. Potentially even more hazardous than the animals are extreme environmental conditions you may encounter, such as intense sun, torrential rain, lightning and strong tides.

Call Argenis immediately if you have any health or safety concerns. Transportation to local medical facilities is possible, but challenging given our remote location. The nearest medical clinic is located in Drake Bay, a 45-minute boat ride from Casa Roja. Ebais Medical Center in Agujitas de Drake is open Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Phone: +506-2775-1975). There is also a hospital located just over an hour away from Casa Roja, via riverboat and car/ambulance, in Ciudad Cortes. Hospital Tomás Casas Casajús (500 norte de la Escuela Ojo de Agua) provides 24-hour emergency services (+506-2786-8148).

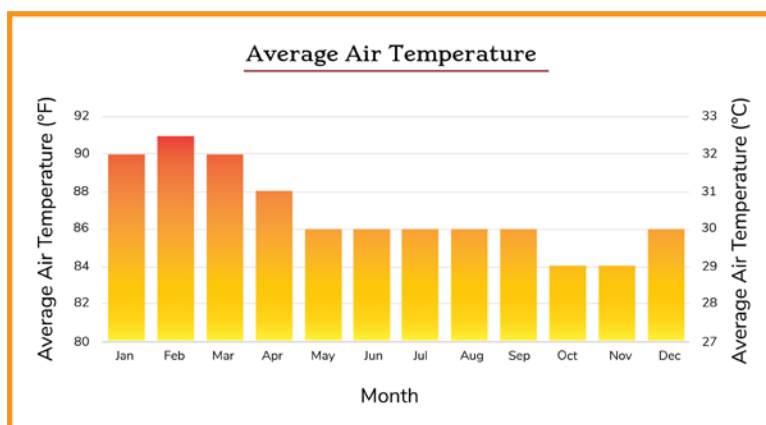
Being informed and aware of your safety can help you enjoy a safe, relaxing, and unforgettable stay at Casa Roja and the Boca del Río Sierpe.





The Sun

The tropical sun is one of Costa Rica's biggest assets, but also one of its main hazards! Far too many visitors underestimate the intensity of the sun near the equator and end up with painful sunburns, or worse. Please make proper sun protection a priority throughout your stay! Don't let cloudy skies fool you, even on overcast days you can end up red, dehydrated, and miserable without proper planning.



Too much sun leaves you feeling drained and reduces your enjoyment. Sunburn, heatstroke, and dehydration are serious issues for foreign travelers visiting Costa Rica who are not used to the heat and humidity of the tropical climate. Taking precautions to avoid exposure to the sun will greatly improve your travel experience. We have various

types of sunscreens for your daily use, so apply liberally and often. Zinc-based options are more environmentally friendly, as they do not damage coral reefs. Because of Casa Roja's open-air design, it is still possible to get sunburned at the house, even on a cloudy day. Long sleeved shirts, long pants, a broad brimmed hat and plenty of sunscreen are your best defenses against the sun!

Over-exposure to the sun and excessive sweating can lead to heat exhaustion or heatstroke. These conditions have similar symptoms, which can include light-headedness or dizziness, fatigue, confusion, thirst, an increased heart rate or breathing, and hot, dry skin

that is flushed but not sweaty. Heat stroke can be serious, and even deadly, so ask for help and try to take some simple first-aid steps at the first sign of these symptoms. These include getting the affected person to a shady area and trying to cool them down as quickly as possible, such as by removing clothing, applying cool water to the skin and fanning, or applying ice packs to the armpits or groin area. To prevent dehydration, drink plenty of water and sports drinks to balance electrolytes. Avoid excessive coffee, caffeinated tea, soda and alcohol, which can all contribute to dehydration.



Dehydration influences how you feel physically at the end of the day. This is especially true when guests are reluctant to drink water when traveling by boat and going on tours without bathrooms. Please don't make the same mistake – drink lots and lots of water! We provide various canteen options and a variety of drinks, including fresh coconut water. Carrying a bottle of cold fruit drink encourages you to drink more during the day. Look in the cupboards for powdered drinks, including low-calorie options.

Animals and Plants

After the sun, protection from **biting insects** should be your next priority. Luckily, the same long-sleeve shirt that protects you from the sun also works for bugs (that, and insect repellent). Generally, the most bothersome insects at Casa Roja are sandflies (no-see-ums), but mosquitos can be bothersome anywhere else you venture, so always be prepared. Sandflies are sporadic but definitely the worst during new and full moon periods. You know you've been bitten by a sandfly if you feel a bite but don't see anything at first. Look closely and you'll see a black speck, the source of the pain. Sandfly bites appear as little red bumps in anywhere from minutes to hours after the bite. Anti-itch cream (located in the first aid kit and bathrooms) can help reduce itching, but prevention is key.



Crocodiles have been spotted on the beach and are common in the Sierpe River, mangroves, boca, and ocean, so always use caution when entering the water. American crocodiles aren't typically aggressive and attacks on human are infrequent in Costa Rica, but they do happen. Avoid swimming at night and avoid excess splashing.



23 of the 140 different snake species in Costa Rica are venomous. Some snakes live in tree tops, while others prefer rocks or ground cover, and they often blend in amazingly well with their environment. Again, be mindful, stay alert and look before you step, grab, sit, or lay down to make sure there aren't any snakes hiding there! The venomous fer-de-lance has been encountered on the Casa Roja property. Closed-toed shoes that cover your ankles

are recommended at all times when walking or hiking, and knee-high rubber boots (which we provide) are required when walking the Casa Roja property or nearby jungle.



Larger, less bothersome, wildlife abounds at Casa Roja as well. With any luck, you may see coatis, capuchin and howler monkeys, crocodiles, sloths, anteaters, agoutis, peccaries, poison dart frogs, butterflies, iguanas, macaws, toucans, and many other animals. Those lucky enough to spot any of these animals **must not attempt to feed, approach or touch them – they are wild, and should remain that way!**

The plant diversity on the Osa Peninsula is perhaps even more astonishing. Many plants are incredibly beautiful, some are edible, others are poisonous! Several of the plant species growing in the vicinity of Casa Roja have thorns or sharp-edged leaves. Enjoy walks through the forest with open eyes, and **do not eat any nuts or fruits you find in the forest, unless Casa Roja staff confirms that it is safe!** Coconuts, mangos, papayas and even cacao can be eaten fresh off the tree – ask Argenis or Marvin to show you where they grow!





The River and the Ocean

Be aware of large waves, strong tides and fast currents! Statistically, drowning is your number two risk in Costa Rica (after driving), and since you won't be driving at Casa Roja, it is now your number one risk. Please use caution entering the river or ocean around the boca. Outgoing tides are especially dangerous since you, your kayak, or boat can be quickly swept out to sea. Argenis will advise you on currents and tides, and point out the best – and safest – spots to get in the water. **Please be sure to let Argenis know when and where you are planning on swimming or using kayaks or other equipment.**



Guidelines and Tips Around the House

In the House

No paper products in the toilets, please! Casa Roja is an environmentally sensitive location, so please help us keep our septic systems operating effectively. Dispose of all paper products in waste paper baskets and take advantage of our high-tech toilet technology. There are airtight containers in each bathroom where you can find miscellaneous toiletry items.

The security cameras are installed for your safety. However, we understand that some people are uncomfortable with cameras, especially around the house. Video files are not viewed off-site, but stored to a local hard drive and only viewed by you or Argenis, if the need arises. Feel free to cover the camera in the main living room if you feel it intrudes on your privacy.



Help us conserve the environment by conserving power and being prudent with food and drinks. It takes significant resources to get supplies to Casa Roja, so please use them wisely by finishing drinks and open containers, and not leaving food out to spoil. Similarly, it takes a substantial amount of power to keep your supplies frozen, cold or fresh. Please be mindful to fully close refrigerator/freezer doors. Water is abundant but hot water takes natural gas to heat, so use hot water wisely. Towels can be used more than once by hanging them up to dry. We change sheets and provide general laundry service upon request.

Try to charge electronics during the day and unplug items at night. During the day, the solar energy system produces enough power to recharge our house batteries and your electronics. At night, electronics can drain the house batteries and result in the need to run a gas-powered generator, which we prefer to avoid. It is okay to charge items at night when needed for tours the next morning. Place devices in airplane mode to save power.

Turn the fans off when they're not needed. Casa Roja is solar powered and battery storage is always challenging, so please try to conserve energy by turning off fans and other appliances when not in use.



Please remember to turn off unnecessary lights! For the same reasons we ask you to limit charging of electronics to daylight hours, please remember turn off lights around the house when you don't need them. It is especially easy to forget turning outside lights off, or – if you're up before sunrise – overlook that they're still on when it gets light!

Insects are attracted to light, so keep them off or low when possible. The overhead lights in the house are bright and energy efficient, but don't create much ambiance. The four hanging lights outside the screen create a nice ambiance and enough light to move about in the living area. Use the LED candles to light bedrooms and baths and help you move about the house in soft light. Leave the lights off in bedrooms when not in use. Always have a flashlight handy.



Keep bedroom doors closed in the evenings and nights. Even on bug-free nights (which is most of the time), a variety of insects can be flying about, especially if the screens are open and lights are on. Keep bedroom doors closed, especially in the evenings and at night. This will ensure you sleep soundly without being bothered by mosquitos and sandflies, and also reduces the chances of encountering creepy-crawlers during bathroom visits. Sleeping with the fans on keeps you cool and the bugs off you.



Lightweight long-sleeved shirt and pants are your best protection against sandflies, since bug repellent doesn't really seem to work. Burning bug repellent coils may help a little, but, if you suspect sandflies are going to be a problem, close the screens sooner rather than later, usually in the evening as the sun is setting. Sandfly bites result in itchy red bumps that are bothersome, so take precautions.



Don't throw towels and clothes on the floor and keep your luggage zipped. Scorpions, spiders and bugs seek out places to hide, so don't let them into your things. Put things you would like washed out back, rather than on the floor. Stand shoes up against the wall, tips up.



Keep sand outside the house as much as possible. If you bring sand and dirt into the house, you or someone else has to remove it eventually. Prevention is key! Use the footbath or the outdoor shower to rinse off outside. Put wet clothes, sandy clothes and towels on the outside counter.

Place sandy towels and clothing on the outside sink to be rinsed prior to placing in the washing machine. Argenis and Graciela will take care of all laundry needs for you, or feel free to use the washing machine in the bodega as needed. We like to do laundry in the morning and let clothes air dry during the day, rather than use the dryer.

Close the bedroom blinds in the afternoon to keep the sun out and the rooms cooler. The bedrooms heat up in the afternoon, but much less so if you close the west-facing blinds. Close the blinds and doors in the morning when you leave for day.

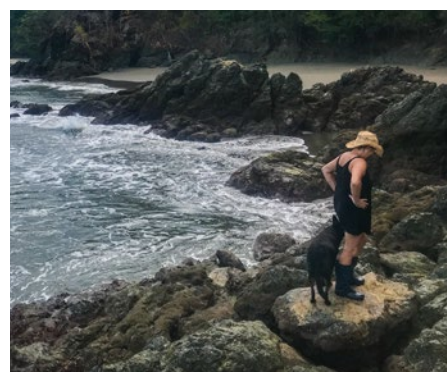




You will find that small changes in location can dramatically influence temperature, humidity, wind, and insects. On days with a nice breeze you can enjoy reading and lounging at Casa Roja throughout the day. On warmer days with no breeze, it can get a little warm in the afternoons. Turn on fans and close the front screen for a little more protection from the sun. Argenis will place lounge chairs for you under the palms near the beach, a good place to have a drink, read, and nap...

Rubber boots are your friends. You'll notice locals wear rubber boots everywhere, all day long, and for good reason. Snakes blend in well to the surrounding leaf litter, and poisonous snakes are found throughout Costa Rica. Boots are your best protection, and are available for you to walk around the property behind the house or go on the forest trails. Although your inclination may be to slip boots on barefoot, it's a sure recipe for blisters. Wear socks, and if you're walking the beach to Playa Ganado, anticipate that your boots and socks will get wet - it's part of the adventure!

Boots are suitable footwear for rocky beach points around the boca, or south of Playa Marvin. The rocks along the river and ocean are slippery and dangerous to walk on. If you walk on them, please wear footwear such as boots, which provide decent traction, and ankle and leg protection.



Don't wander too far from the house at night, and carry a flashlight. Please pay attention to your surroundings. Don't wander away from the house at night without Argenis, boots, and a flashlight.

When you leave for the day, remember to bring water, sunscreen, sunglasses, bug repellent, hat, rain jacket, binoculars, and snacks. There are drybags and backpacks located around the house for your use.



In the Kitchen

Casa Roja staff will assist you with food preparations according to your preferences.

Guests are typically on their own for **breakfast**. You will find the kitchen stocked with fresh fruit, fresh eggs from our chickens, bacon and sausage from a local farm, plantains, tortillas, cheese, coffee and tea, and we recommend relying mostly on these fresh, locally sourced staples. We have found the flavor and quality of most dairy products in Costa Rica a bit disappointing, but can make yogurt & Co. available upon request.



For **lunch** and throughout the day, especially if involves lounging around the house and beach, guests are typically happy making tacos, snacking on home-made tortilla chips and fresh salsa, experimenting with fruit cocktails, and generally enjoy their privacy around the house. On days that include activities, such as early morning mangrove tour, perhaps with a stop on the way back for a jungle hike and a swim on a remote beach, Graciela will gladly

pack a lunch for you or have something prepared when you return.



Graciela usually prepares **dinner** for our guests on most nights, but of course you are welcome to cook your own food on your schedule if you wish. Graciela's dinners range from traditional Costa Rican dishes (comida típica) to Italian-inspired comfort food. Freshly caught fish from the river or ocean are obviously among



our favorites, and snapper and dorado (mahi-mahi) are plentiful. For carnivores, we definitely recommend a beach BBQ during your stay! We're sure you'll enjoy the various cuts of local beef, pork, and chicken, basted with home-made Casa Roja marinade, cooked slowly over a wood fire on the beach. There's usually plenty of food to enjoy leftovers for a couple of days (our favorite!).



Tap water is safe to drink. There's a variety of sizes of insulated reusable water bottles in the cupboards for you to use throughout your stay. Our tap water is sourced from two streams in the pristine jungle on the property, triple-filtered and UV treated prior to reaching the house.

Put food away and clean counters and dishes after food and drink preparation. Keeping the Casa clean and orderly increases your enjoyment by reducing insects and unpleasant encounters with animals. Ants, the clean-up crew of the rain forest, are attracted to most foods and will quickly swarm around edibles left on the counter or fallen

on the floor! Keep the sinks clean and empty drain traps. Wipe counters often. Clean up spills and pick up crumbs as you notice them. Put dirty kitchen towels on the outside counter to be washed later.

Minimize chances of animal encounters at the house during the night. Make sure the kitchen, BBQ, and fish cleaning station are clean and all food has been removed. Put beer, wine, soda cans and bottles in the outside recycling container.

You will find a traditional Costa Rican coffee maker, a chorreador ("dripper"), in the kitchen. It may seem a bit cumbersome at first – it takes a few minutes to make a fresh cup, and grounds need to be emptied – but you will probably like it after you get used to it. After all, who knows better about preparing a great cup of coffee than Costa Ricans? Start with about 2-3 tablespoons for the first cup, then add an additional tablespoon for each additional cup. Pour the water in slowly and be patient. When it's full or you want to start with fresh grounds, rinse the grounds out in the foot rinsing station outside. Coffee and tea are under the counter in an airtight container.





Coconut water can be poured over ice, mixed into cocktails, used for cooking, treating wounds, basically everything in Costa Rica. The only thing wrong with this ultimate drupe (fruit/nut/seed) is how hard they are to open! Please don't risk injury. Ask Argenis or Marvin to open coconuts for you. They also delight in teaching people how to safely get to their delicious content – watch, learn, and then give it a try!

Costa Rican Limes are the greatest fruit on the planet, and the best ones grow wild, across the river, on Isla Violín. The Costa Rican lime is a well-kept secret, but Argenis will gladly take you across the river to pick some! Add to cocktails, use in ceviche, cucumber salad, as salad dressing, in beer, over avocado, on tacos, with tequila, ... use your imagination!



Plantains make cooking breakfast worth it! A staple for Costa Ricans, plantains are eaten and cooked in a variety of forms and dishes throughout the year. Plantains are best when ripe and fried on the grill or in a pan until golden and crispy. A ripe plantain looks like a rotten banana, but the worse the plantain looks, the sweeter it is! Graciela would love to introduce you to this local staple, prepare some for you, or show you how to do it yourself!

On the Beach and Around the Boca



Mosquitos generally aren't a problem at Casa Roja; however, be prepared when you go to the beach, waterfall, jungle, or mangroves (basically everywhere else). Apply bug repellent, and wear (or at least take) protective clothing if you go anywhere.

If you venture down to the beach and shaded palm area, be prepared for mosquitoes and sandflies, no matter what time of day it is. Sandfly bites can be extensive before you realize it! Be especially aware of your ankles and feet, apparently their preferred food.

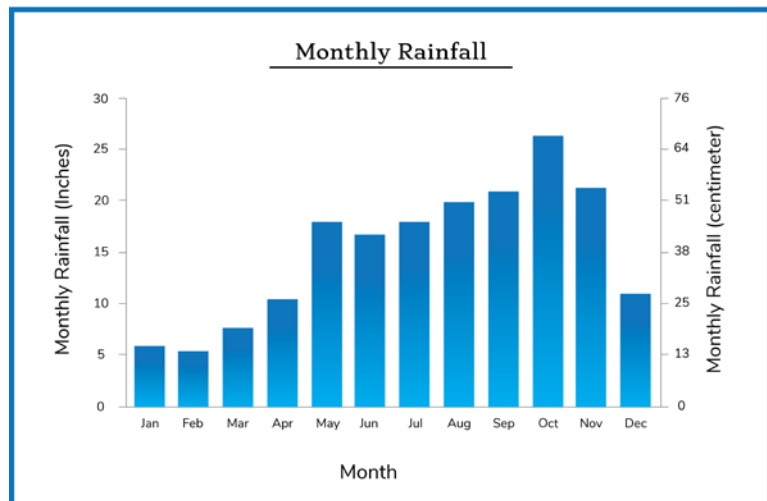
All beaches in Costa Rica are public, including the ones around Casa Roja. Tour boats and other tourists may be present at any time, but if they stop by, it's usually in the early afternoon.

Equipment, Tools and Other Resources

Rubber boots. Have we mentioned there are rubber boots for you to use at the house? Yes, they're that important, we can't tell you enough. If you wear other shoes, they should have sturdy soles and be able to withstand mud and water. In the forest, on the trails and remote parts of the property, or on excursions to nearby places such as Isla Violín, please wear the botas (rubber boots)! Walking sticks are also provided.

While most of the rain falls from May through October, there is a chance of being caught in a downpour any time of the year. Here in the tropics, rain often falls hard and heavy, turning creeks into torrents in a matter of minutes. Those who travel lightly - without water-sensitive equipment - have little to worry about, but when packing guidebooks, valuable documents, camera equipment, or other electronics

it is advisable to **make use of one of the waterproof dry bags provided at Casa Roja.**



The **two-way radios** are the best way to get in touch with Argenis or Graciela, or to communicate amongst yourselves if the group splits up. Note that these radios work in close range (such as from the house to the beach) but will not provide communication with people at Casa Roja while on a tour off-site.

Flashlights are essential for moving around the boca in the dark. A selection of flashlights and headlamps are found under the counter in the kitchen, along with batteries. If there is even a remote chance you may not return to the house until after dark, please bring a flashlight or headlamp.



The **Nikon zoom binoculars** are great for watching the boats pass the boca. Keep them on the table for quick access and take the wildlife binoculars with you on hikes or to the beach. You will see a variety of boats going by the boca all day long, and much of the traffic is predictable. Regular shuttles carrying tourists between Sierpe and Drake Bay navigate the mouth around the same time each day. Other boats may be heading to the offshore fishing grounds, dive locations or to the mangroves.



The **spotting scope** can also be used to view Isla Violín and the surrounding boca. It should be out and on a tripod, but if it isn't, locate it on the shelf or ask Argenis to set it up.

We have a variety of **books on Costa Rican wildlife, plants, culture, local history and geography** available to read and peruse. Some may be on coffee table, others can be found in airtight bins on the shelf.

The selection of **fishing tackle** available at the house will cover all the needs of novice and advanced anglers. Whether you just want to catch some dinner with a handline on the beach, cast lures to barracuda, fly fish for jacks, or troll nearshore for dorado, we have you covered. Argenis and/or Marvin will delight in showing you the best spots and techniques, from shore or by boat. Please treat the equipment as if it were your own, rinse with freshwater after use, and store appropriately when you're done fishing for the day. For those wanting to pursue sailfish, tuna and other offshore species, we can arrange for an fishing guide to pick you up for a day on the high seas (guide rates apply).



Kayaks, surfboards, boogie boards, and other water and beach equipment are available to use. As mentioned above, check with Argenis before going into the river or ocean. He will help you with the equipment, provide tide information, and let you know where and when it's best to go in the water.



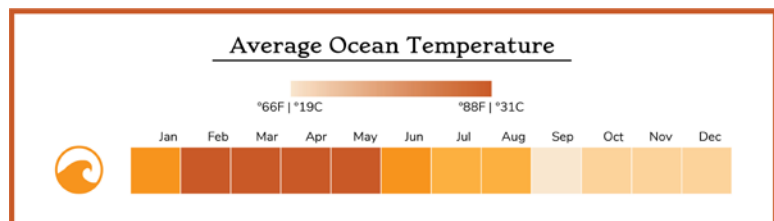
What to do at Casa Roja

There are lots of different ways to enjoy and fill your time while staying at Casa Roja. In case you're looking for ideas on what to do, we've compiled a few personal favorites to serve as suggestions.



Swim, boogie board, surf, or kayak from the beach in front of Casa Roja. The beach right in front of Casa Roja is popular with locals. Tour boats on their way back to Sierpe from Drake, Corcovado, and Caño Island often stop at the beach in the afternoon for lunch. Other rental houses and lodges also bring their guests to the beach. The best times to swim in the river or ocean near the boca are low and incoming tides. High and outgoing tides are dangerous and should be avoided. The beaches facing the ocean, just around the point from Casa Roja, have larger waves and are better suited for boogie boarding and surfing. If you decide to take the kayak for a spin, please restrain yourself to the river. It

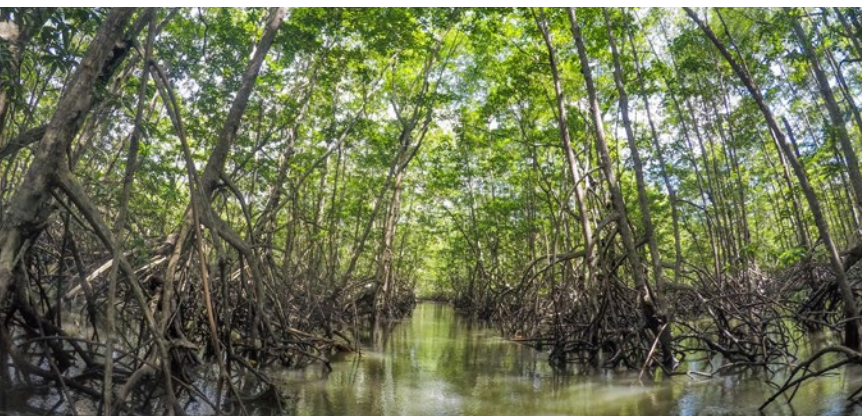
is advisable to stay close to the shoreline (where the tidal currents are minimal) – please do not attempt to cross to Isla Violín by kayak! If you want to go there, Argenis will gladly take you by boat! Kayaking in the bay behind the house, and upstream from there, offers opportunity to see wildlife and to get up close with the mangrove forests. Take a radio with you if you go.



Walk to Playa Marvin. Marvin's beach is a serene little cove and on the way to the waterfall and Playa Ganado. When you visit the beach, make sure it's not during a rising tide. The beach gets cut off at high tide, although there is a jungle trail up to Marvin's house and



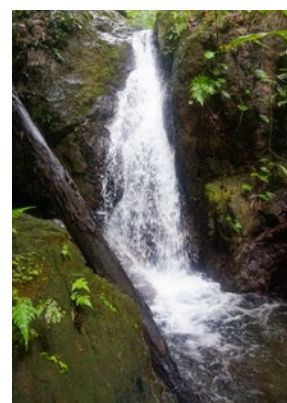
eventually to Casa Roja. At the far end of the beach is a rocky point, which is also the beach trail to Playa Ganado. This is a beautiful trail, but only accessible during very low tides! If you want to go, you need to be accompanied by Argenis. The rocks are slippery and unexpected waves can be dangerous. Close to the rocks is a small freshwater lagoon where crocodiles can sometimes be spotted.



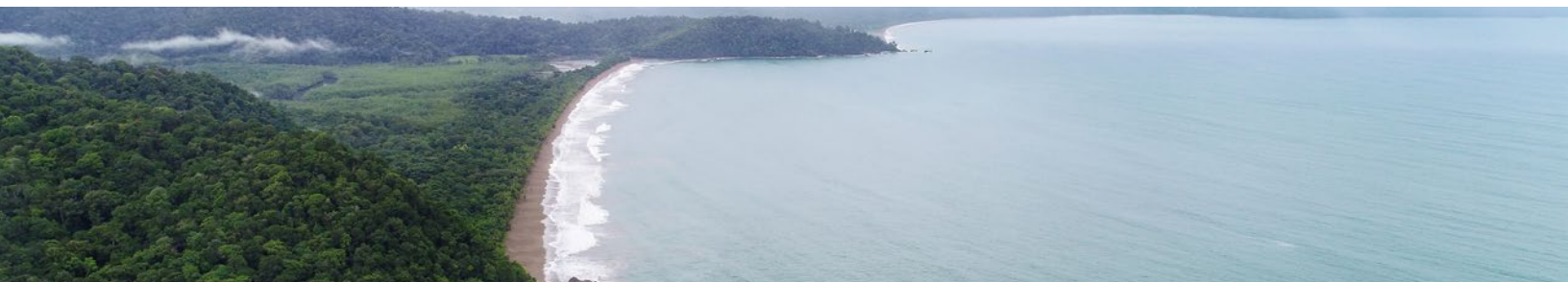
Get up close and personal with walking trees. As you saw during your boatride to Casa Roja, the channels of the Sierpe River are lined with mangroves, trees adapted to saltwater. Their trunks are propped up on roots that look like legs, giving the impression that the trees are, in fact, walking. They don't really move, but the thicket of "legs" provides shelter for a huge variety of animals and serves as an important nursery area

for many species of fish and wildlife. Low tide, when the mangled roots are mostly exposed, is the best time to explore the mangroves. While there, chances are you'll see a variety of wildlife, from the red and blue mangrove crabs to sloths high up in the tree tops. The only way to fully immerse yourself in the mangroves is by boat, so ask Argenis to take you on a tour, or hop in the kayak and paddle upstream.

Take a shower under a waterfall. Several short trails around Casa Roja provide opportunities to explore the surrounding forest, see local wildlife, and access Playa Ganado, a remote beach where solitude is just about guaranteed. A short spur off the trail leads to a small and inviting waterfall, and those tempted by a natural, wet massage can stand in the small pool at the base of the fall and enjoy the pelting gush of water on their back and shoulders. Depending on the amount of recent rainfall and one's position under the falls, the intensity of this jungle massage ranges from relaxing to "deep tissue." Ask Marvin or Arjenis to show you where it is and remember to wear rubber boots if you go!



Hike to Playa Ganado. Playa Ganado can be accessed via the trail system through the forest, or – but only at low tide – via the beach by heading south along a strip of sand on the ocean side of rocky outcroppings that are battered by waves once the tide begins to rise. The beach offers picturesque vistas of a classical tropical paradise, long strolls in solitude, and beachcombing. Several sections of the trail are steep and can be too slippery (and dangerous) to enjoyably navigate after strong rainfall. The tide doesn't remain low for long, so you either need to return soon along the beach, or hike back through the jungle. Either way, don't undertake this adventure without Argenis or Marvin.





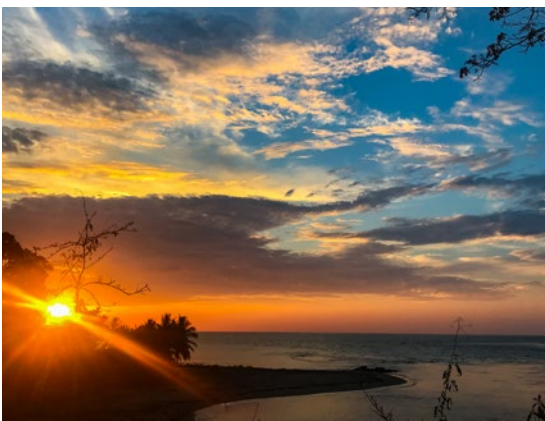
Go fishing. The fishing opportunities around the boca are enough to keep even an experienced angler busy for weeks. All the necessary equipment is provided for you at Casa Roja, and Argenis will gladly show you the right technique and point out some good spots to cast a line from the beach, or take you in the boat to fish upriver or out on the ocean. It's quite rewarding to catch your own dinner, and nearly all of the fish caught in the area make excellent table fare.

Use a cast net to catch bait. Effectively throwing a cast net may look easy, but it isn't! If you feel like testing your skills at this artisanal art, ask Argenis or Marvin to give you a tutorial. If you can master the challenge, use the bait you catch to fish for some of the larger fish of the boca – odds are you'll have dinner on the end of your line before too long!



Check out the “sparkling water” at the beach in front of Casa Roja. Bioluminescent algae live in the waters of the boca, and when the water is agitated, they give off a tiny flash of yellow and green light. This, however, can only be observed in the dark, ideally during a new moon. Take a stroll after dinner, slip off your sandals and take a few steps in the lapping waves on the beach right in front of the house. Feel the sand between your toes, watch the water (flashlight off!), and see thousands of tiny sparkles light up with every step. If you happen to be at Casa Roja during the wet season, don't be startled by the occasional toad on the paths at night!

Listen to the jungle waking up. No, not in the morning. After the sun goes down – which is always fairly early in the evening – the nightly concert begins as the jungle comes alive with noise. The insect world, only occasionally interrupted by the clicking of geckos or the ribbiting of frogs, creates a cacophony of sounds. If you're up for a challenge, try and count the number of distinct calls, chirps, trills and rattles you can make out in the nightly serenade.



Go wildlife watching. Estero Azul, just upstream from the town of Sierpe, might seem like an unlikely place for wildlife viewing, since this canal is lined with houses and plantations. However, the narrow band of trees and vegetation along the straight waterway harbors enough wildlife for prime viewing up close, from birds and monkeys to snakes and crocodiles. It makes for a great half-day excursion, and since it's only a stones-throw from Las Vegas, our favorite bar and restaurant in Sierpe, where you could stop for a bathroom break or coffee, breakfast, lunch, or drinks! It's best to go early in the morning (6 am or 6:30 am) since just traveling upriver at this time is worth the trip.



Birdwatching. As the old saying goes, the early bird catches the worm. While most birds in Costa Rica aren't after worms, they all seem to be up early. The first rays of the sun are vociferously announced by the feathered occupants of the forest, and their different calls will likely be noticed by all but the soundest of sleepers. This is great opportunity to make yourself a great cup of Costa Rican coffee, grab the binoculars and try to figure out which birds are responsible for the early morning ruckus.

Search for sea turtles at night. During certain times of the year, there is a chance to observe sea turtles laying their eggs in the sand, and, a few weeks later, watch the hatchlings make their way down the beach and into the surf. Getting a glimpse of the sea turtle action, however, requires a night-time visit to the beach – and a good amount of luck. Visitors are more likely to find freshly disturbed patches of sand during the day, a sign that precious eggs are incubating a foot or two below the surface. It is imperative to refrain from walking on or attempting to unearth turtle nests!



Hike Isla Violín to gather Costa Rican Limes. Argenis will gladly take you across the river to pick some wild Costa Rican limes on Isla Violín! If you like the tangy taste of citrus, you'll love these limes! They can be used for just about everything, from ceviche to tacos, smoothies to cocktails. If you're interested, plan to go early during your stay, and stock up for the duration of your visit!

Investigate the tidepools and rocks at the far end of Marvin's beach. During low tide, ocean critters get "stranded" in the pools of water left behind by the receding sea. This offers a great opportunity to see some sea creatures up close and personal, without having to get in the water. Be careful, however – the rocks are slippery!



Look for jungle “treasures.” Attentive wanderers may spot some extraordinary fruits and seeds on the boca trails, such as the red and black seeds (sp. “nene”) of the Ormosia, sometimes referred to as the necklace tree. These seeds are highly poisonous when ingested, but often used for jewelry and make a nice souvenir. Finger-long, fuzzy, sloth-colored seed pods can be found near the base of Kapok trees. Wild cacao plants invite visitors to try the basic ingredient of chocolate. The seeds are quite bitter fresh off the tree, but the juicy pulp surrounding the beans is

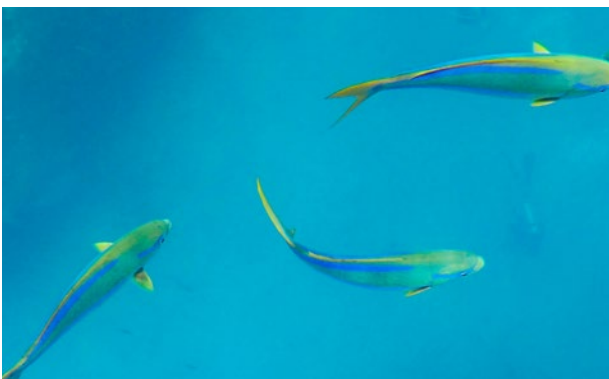
quite tasty. The monkeys like it too, and it is often difficult to find ripe fruit that hasn’t been nibbled on. In addition, thorny trees, beautiful flowers, stunning bromeliads and many other botanical treasures await those willing to explore the forest floor.

Tour the nearshore ocean.

Even if you don’t like to go fishing, you should consider a nearshore ocean excursion with Argenis. The rocky islands just north of the boca are home to large colonies of sea birds, including boobies, albatrosses and frigate birds. The sea caves along the rocky shore are rumored to contain pirate treasure, and in the water, there’s a chance you may see dolphins, whales and sea turtles at any time of the



year. To the south of the boca you can cruise along Playa Gandado, or even visit Drake Bay, the nearest town to Casa Roja and hub for local eco-tourism and fishing adventures.



Go snorkeling or SCUBA diving. The best time to snorkel or dive is in the dry season (December to April) when the visibility is good. Caño Island, a biological reserve off the coast visible from Casa Roja, is a popular destination for those looking to explore tropical sea life up close. Snorkelers can spot colorful reef fish, whitetip reef sharks, large schools of barracuda, jacks, groupers, snappers, and many other species, along



with some of the healthiest coral reefs of the region. Visitors snorkeling at Caño Island are required to wear a buoyant life jacket, part of the regulations in place to protect the corals. Additional options include Playa San Josecito, a sheltered bay south of Drake Bay that's great for swimming and snorkeling, especially for kids. Argenis can take you snorkeling, and for those with a valid SCUBA certification looking for a more intimate experience, we can arrange trips with dive tour operators. Of course, also feel free to do your own research and book an outing with a trusted outfitter.

Take advantage of unexpected excursions with locals. Of all the tours and activities that are offered in southern Costa Rica, unexpected opportunities to attend local events can result in some of the most memorable experiences. Local festivities and gatherings that can't be found in any travel guide can provide a candid immersion into local custom and culture - if you're up for it! We've been fortunate to attend some community events deep within the maze of the region's waterways, including horseback riding competitions among local cowboys (and others brave enough to participate) and jungle rodeos.



At these community gatherings, complete with food, drink and musical entertainment, we've met amazing people, sampled authentic cuisine, and watched some spirited competitions among incredibly skilled locals. These events are typically rather rustic affairs far off the paths traveled by most tourists. While practically impossible to plan ahead for such opportunities, you should definitely consider tagging along if Argenis extends an invitation. If you decide to join the festivities, please keep in mind to keep an open mind! Local standards for safety, food hygiene and animal welfare may differ from your own, but you may be rewarded with an enriching behind-the-scenes experience that few tourists get to enjoy.

Watch the taxi boats go by in the morning while having coffee or tea. Each day, like clockwork, the taxi boats pass the boca heading from Drake Bay to Sierpe, or vice versa. The first boats leave Drake Bay at 7:15 am and pass the boca around 8 am. They travel back and forth several times a day, but only rarely stop at the boca. When the ocean is rough, however, they may pause for a few minutes on the water, giving the captains a chance to observe the waves and find the best route and timing to navigate between river and ocean.



Make a rum or guaro cocktail. Rum and Guaro are the two most popular spirits in Costa Rica. And although we'd like to boast about great Costa Rican rum, Flor de Caña, from Nicaragua, is the real rum star in the region. The basis for almost any frozen cocktail is the same. First, locate a ripe fruit that you'd like to turn into a cocktail, add to blender with ice, add some coconut water, some coconut cream, a little rum, and blend.... If you're looking for inspiration, check out the selection of cocktail recipes located in the kitchen.



Turn the lights off and watch the stars at night. There's hardly a better place to watch the stars than far from city lights, at the boca, especially if you are lucky enough to visit during a new moon. The sky is typically best, i.e. cloudless, in the dry season, from November through May.

Grab some supplies and enjoy the shade and breeze under the coconut palms. Fill yourself a thermos with your favorite beverage, such as ice-cold coconut water (pipa fría), a tropical fruit smoothie, or even a thermos-sized cocktail, get comfortable under a palm tree on the beach and watch the world go by...

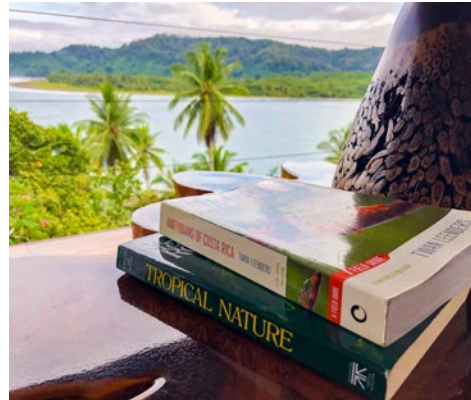


Enjoy the amenities at Casa Roja, and cook with a view. Whether it's breakfast in the morning, a tropical fruit smoothie mid-day, or barbeque in the evening, Casa Roja is equipped with all the culinary amenities to make your stay enjoyable. Hang out at the house, and enjoy the view while you prepare a meal.

Make tacos for lunch. Whether you just caught a fresh snapper, or you found left-over fish from dinner in the fridge, tacos are a popular and healthy option anytime. Fresh pineapple or mango add a tropical flair to salsas and slaws, and corn and flour tortillas are typically found in the fridge. Serve with Isla Violín lime wedges!

Enjoy doing nothing. Read, listen, daydream, nap... Honestly, some of the best times are here at the house, so make sure to enjoy your down-time.

Watch the sunset from the beach. Need we say more?





Beyond Casa Roja

The area around the boca is rich with opportunity for all sorts of activities and adventures, most of which Argenis will take you on as you desire. Extended trips to Caño Island and Corcovado require a larger boat and seafaring captain, and we hire local companies to take you on these tours. You pay them directly at the end of the day and we do not receive anything from them in exchange. The tours are private and include boat, captain, first mate, eco-guide, park passes, and lunch. Feel free to ask Argenis to make arrangements for these activities, if desired. The cost is usually around \$750 but can vary a little depending on season and number of guests. We strive to get the best rates for you and work with several companies that regularly provide outstanding tours to our guests.



Visit Caño Island to snorkel or SCUBA dive. Caño Island, located 16 km northwest of the Osa Peninsula in southern Costa Rica, is considered one of the best snorkeling and diving sites in the country. The island is only 3 km long and uninhabited by people, but is home to an abundant diversity of wildlife species – especially underwater. It's a small, forested mountain standing 123 meters (403 feet) tall, ringed by white sandy beaches. The island's waters are home to a diversity of corals, fishes, and other marine animals. The island and the three kilometers of surrounding ocean are designated as a no-take Biological Reserve,



which acts as a refuge for fish that are targeted elsewhere. Designated diving sites are also limited within the protected area to preserve the corals.

The reefs at Caño Island are biologically diverse, with at least 212 species of fish recorded. In addition to colorful reef fish, you might observe large schools of grunts, snappers, needlefish, jacks, barracuda, and tuna swimming around Caño. In addition, white-tipped reef sharks are a common sight, and you could be lucky enough to spot olive ridley sea turtles or manta rays. It is also common to see dolphins on the boat ride to the island, and occasionally humpback whales that come to Central America to give birth and nurse their calves. Tours to Caño Island leave early in the morning and usually last 6–8 hours. Getting to the island takes about 45 minutes from Casa Roja, although this can vary depending on ocean conditions. Take medication if you are prone to seasickness – even on a calm day, the long ride to the island in a small boat can be a bumpy one.





Above water, Caño's Biological Reserve includes forests and hiking trails, and is treasured as a special archeological site that contains indigenous artifacts, including the mysterious Diquís stone spheres. It is thought that the island was used as an indigenous cemetery during pre-Columbian times. The name "Caño" comes from the colonial Spanish visitors, who observed abundant creeks that they called caños (meaning "spout" in Spanish). The island's terrestrial wildlife is more limited than its marine life, but it is possible to observe pacas, peccaries, tree frogs, snakes, lizards, and birds. The Reserve is managed by the Costa Rican government. The tree-lined beach near the station offers both sunny and shady spots for relaxing. There is no need to bring extra snorkel or dive equipment because everything you will need is included in the fees for your tour.



Tours to Caño Island can be arranged during your stay at Casa Roja, and can be combined with fishing tours. No overnight camping is allowed on the island. The island is a popular destination for tourists, so anticipate crowds during your visit. Caño can experience a lot of rainfall in some months and be hot during others. The driest months are December to April, which are also the best times for snorkeling visibility and whale watching. Food is not allowed on the island, so be prepared to eat on the boat. Visitors should pack water, snacks, beach gear, sunscreen, bug spray, and hiking shoes. Caño Island snorkel tours typically don't go to shore for a restroom stop during the trip, so be prepared to do as the fishes do if you need to go.





Visit Corcovado National Park. Most people who travel to southern Costa Rica do so to visit Corcovado National Park, the crown jewel of the Osa Peninsula. National Geographic has described it as “the most biologically intense place on earth,” since it boasts 2.5% of the world’s species in an area of just 445 km² (172 mi²). This hotspot of tropical life offers arguably the best scenery in Central America and a chance to witness some of the region’s most iconic animals, including jaguars, pumas, sloths, tapirs, four species of monkeys, and scarlet macaws, to name only a few. The park is situated in the heart of the Osa Peninsula’s rainforest and borders the Pacific Ocean. It was founded in 1975 along with other nearby conservation areas to help promote ecotourism and to protect important habitats and an astounding array of biodiversity.



In Corcovado you can find all the major ecosystems of the Osa Peninsula, such as lowland rainforests, upland cloud forests, “yolillo” palm forests, mangrove swamps, beaches, and coastal marine habitats. Within this diverse park live 500 species of trees, at least 367 species of birds, 140 mammals, 117 amphibians and reptiles, 40 species of freshwater fish, and 6,000-10,000 different species of insects. Corcovado is famous for its terrestrial ecosystems, but it also protects rocky and coral reef communities, including 11 species of corals. It is truly a nature-lover’s paradise!



Although the park is very remote, thousands of people make the trip annually for day hikes, beach trips, backpacking, or research purposes. There are five ranger stations where visitors can enter the park, and two available by boat from Casa Roja, the San Perdillo and Sirena ranger stations.



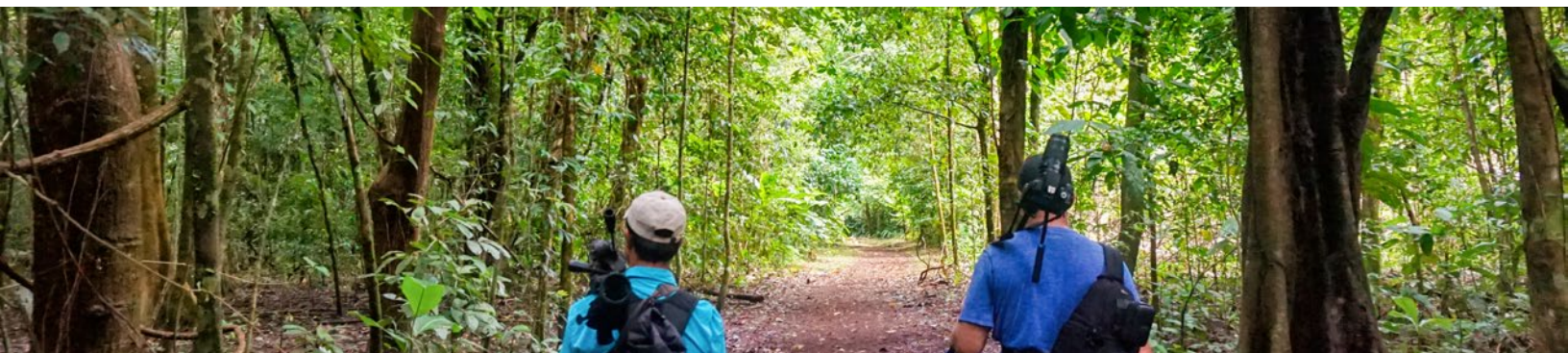
San Pedrillo Ranger station is the more northerly entrance point to Corcovado National Park, a much shorter boat ride from Casa Roja (about 45 – 60 minutes) and the area of the park we recommend for day trips. Less travel time means more time in the park! At San Pedrillo, the main habitat is primary rainforest, with old growth trees, waterfalls and pristine beaches, and odds are that there will be less tourists on any given day than at Sirena. You'll have the same chances of spotting wildlife at San Pedrillo as at Sirena during daytrips, though you might be more likely to see a Puma here, whereas tapir sightings tend to be a little more common at Sirena.



The recently renovated Sirena Ranger Station is the second option for park visitors arriving from Sierpe or Casa Roja, about a two-hour boat ride south along the coast from the boca. This is where the park headquarters, including a cafeteria and gift shop, are located, and overnight stays at the station's bunkhouses are possible. Much of the forest in this area is second-growth, meaning it was previously logged but has regrown since the area was granted protected status in 1975.

Regardless of which access point you choose, be prepared for a wet landing (jump off the boat near the beach, and wade to shore). Wearing sandals is a great choice for the boat ride, sturdier boots are recommended for the park trails. Please note that all visitors to the park must be accompanied by a certified guide, and the number of daily visitors allowed in the park is limited. We can help you arrange tours with local guides, but let us know 30 days in advance during the high season.





Tips for Visiting Corcovado National Park

- Expect to see other people on your visit. The park is very popular and people follow the same well-traveled trails. Ask your guide to start a little earlier to be among the first on the trails. Consider walking less popular trails during the busy season if you prefer solitude.
- Some areas of the park get up to 18 feet of rainfall annually, and many trails require river crossings year-round. Expect to get wet May–November.
- It gets very hot during the day, so we recommend carrying at least a liter of water on hikes. You can refill water for free at the Ranger stations. **Bathrooms are available at San Perdillo and Sirena ranger stations.**
- River crossings and beach trails can be dangerous due to tides and crocodiles. Educate yourself on the risks of waterways in Costa Rica.
- You are prohibited from bringing meals into the park (to protect animals), but you can bring snacks. Your guide will serve fruit and other food near the end of your hike. The Sirena Ranger Station has drinks, snacks and meals for purchase.
- Staying quiet as you hike will increase your chances of seeing animals.





Visit Drake Bay. The legacy of Sir Francis Drake, famous English seafarer in the 16th century, looms large in southern Costa Rica. Celebrated a hero by his British compatriots, but branded a pirate by the Spanish, the bay on the northwest shore of the Osa peninsula now bears his name, Drake Bay. He reportedly made landfall there in 1579, during his circumnavigation of the globe, and a plaque in town commemorates this event. Other sources suggest he actually stopped at Caño island, some 20 kilometers offshore, and now a marine ecological reserve and among the premier destinations for snorkeling and SCUBA diving in the tropical Eastern Pacific.



It is not his ability as an explorer, navigator and seaman, however, that feeds local lore. Rather, his fabled hidden treasures, containing gold and silver raided from Spanish treasure ships, inspire the imagination of locals and even some fortune-seekers from far-away places. Opinions diverge on where the still-missing treasure might be hidden, be it buried near the beaches of Drake Bay (some suggest that may be too obvious), hidden somewhere near the mouth of the mighty Sierpe River, or even stashed in one of the numerous sea caves that grace the rocky shoreline of this area. The latest clues and elaborate theories regarding treasure locations, whether real or

fictitious, are closely guarded secrets, only rarely discussed in vague terms and muffled conversation among the like-minded, fearful of a competitor's success. Many people have risked relationships, live and limb for the promise of striking it rich and finding the treasures that Drake and others allegedly buried in the area – but Drake's legendary treasure has yet to be unearthed.

Development in and around Drake Bay consists mostly of full-service ecoresorts, so most guests get swept off to an lodge shortly after being dropped off by boat-taxi on the beach.

As a result, there isn't much for tourists to do in town, which is primarily a dirt road along the beach. The main road has a small market and an outdoor restaurant or two, good places to grab a drink or lunch and people watch. There is a larger market a short way up the main dirt road, but the rest of the town is spread out there isn't anything notable within walking distance. However, Drake can be a nice place to stop and grab lunch and a beer along the beach after a morning of fishing or snorkeling....



Go fishing! For some of our guests at Casa Roja, exploring the fishing opportunities the area has to offer is among the highlights of their vacation. Whether they choose to venture deep into the maze of mangroves in search of snook and snapper, or decide to head to the high seas in pursuit of off-shore giants, Casa Roja and the surrounding area has a lot to offer to the adventurous angler.

However, even if fishing usually isn't your "thing", we encourage visitors to experience some truly fresh fish for dinner – by catching it yourself! You don't have to go far for a good chance at catching fish: the beach right in front of the house is a great place to wet a line and soak some bait! Whether you choose to use one of the fishing rods available at the house, or opt for the traditional handline (locally referred to as Yo-Yo), our caretakers will gladly assist you with anything you might need to be successful and - if you choose - even with preparing your catch.

Beach fishing right in front of Casa Roja can also appeal to more avid anglers, especially those looking for variety. When fishing bait at the boca, snappers (pargo), jacks (jurel), rays (raya) and moray eels (murena) are among the most frequent catches, but snook (róbalo), grouper (mero) or corvina are always a possibility (some species of snapper and grouper can grow to over 80 lbs).



For those who prefer a more active style of angling, perhaps the best option for spin- and fly fishing in the immediate vicinity is the large, shallow flat right behind the house. Needlefish (aguja) and barracuda abound and can be targeted with spoons or swimbaits from shore, or with a fly from the boat or kayak (there is no backcasting room from shore, but it is wadable along the southern shoreline during low tide). The water is typically calm on this flat (with very little current) and casting close to the rocky outcroppings can yield some explosive



takes. With any luck, some roosterfish (pez gallo) may be in the area – small fish frantically trying to escape hungry roosters will make it fairly obvious when they’re around. Perhaps the biggest challenge to hooking one is to retrieve flies or lures fast enough. Right in front of the house, the two rocky points (where the boat is tied up) usually yield some jacks and snapper.

There is a selection of spinning tackle in the cabina behind the house, as well as an 8-wt fly rod with floating and sinking line. Necessary tackle, including a selection of lures, streamers and poppers is also provided. The most promising time to fish from shore near the house is during slack tide (when the current isn’t too strong), with low tide preferable. High- and low tide are separated by 6 hours and 12.5 minutes - a quarter of the lunar day (24 hours and 50 minutes).



If you care to venture a bit further from the house, the Sierpe River with its vast mangrove forests and myriad of side channels and sloughs upstream of Casa Roja is an explorer’s paradise. Whether from one of the kayaks by yourself or by motorized boat with Argenis, this is a great way to combine river fishing with wildlife watching. When the river runs relatively clear a short distance upstream from the Boca, fishing the mangroves is promising for a variety of

snapper, and perhaps the occasional snook. Further upstream one may find machaca (a fruit-eater related to piranha), especially where trees are dropping fruit, nuts, and blossoms into the water, or a pack of rowdy monkeys drops bits and pieces of fruit. Surface lures or flies (poppers) are the only way to go here. The Estero Azul, a canal that enters the Sierpe River at the town, can also be pretty good for machaca and snapper, and provides a great opportunity to combine fishing with wildlife watching for the whole group or family. Argenis is very talented when it comes to spotting wildlife, and will point out snakes, crocodiles, monkeys, birds, sloths and other animals that appear hidden in plain sight to the casual observer.

A short boatride in the opposite direction – out to the ocean – an entirely different ecosystem awaits anglers. It is more challenging here to consistently catch fish casting lures or flies, and trolling or fishing live bait is typically more effective. If the ocean is calm, trolling and casting lures near the rocky islands a couple of miles to the north of the boca is usually successful for a variety of species, and persistence with fly gear would likely pay off. Getting lures or flies close to the rocks is key, and the boat can only safely navigate closely when seas are calm. When live bait is available, the rocky reefs around the boca rarely disappoint, and may offer the best chance at catching corvina - if successful, Argenis and Graciela will make you the best ceviche ever!



A few miles off shore, fast trolling, especially along lines of flotsam, can yield bonito, different species of jacks, tuna (atun) and dorado. We suggest giving trolling a try, but to always bring a casting rod along, rigged and ready, in case a good opportunity presents itself. The ocean is a big place and sometimes it can take a while to locate fish. Always keep an eye out for signs of fish – such as floating objects that provide cover, or seabirds that indicate baitfish close to the surface - and you might also spot dolphins, whales and turtles! Gear and tackle for near-shore ocean fishing and trolling is provided at Casa Roja.

For those intent on pursuing large pelagic species (sailfish, dorado, tuna, marlin) or deep-reef jigging (amberjack, snapper, grouper, etc.), we recommend booking a local fishing guide, either out of Sierpe or Drake Bay, for the day. Their boats are larger, provide more comfort during a long day offshore, and are configured specifically for finding and catching fish! The guides are also experienced with ocean currents, sea mounts and other features far offshore that concentrate fish in the seemingly homogenous big blue! We can arrange or recommend an offshore guide to pick you up for a day on the high seas (guide rates apply).

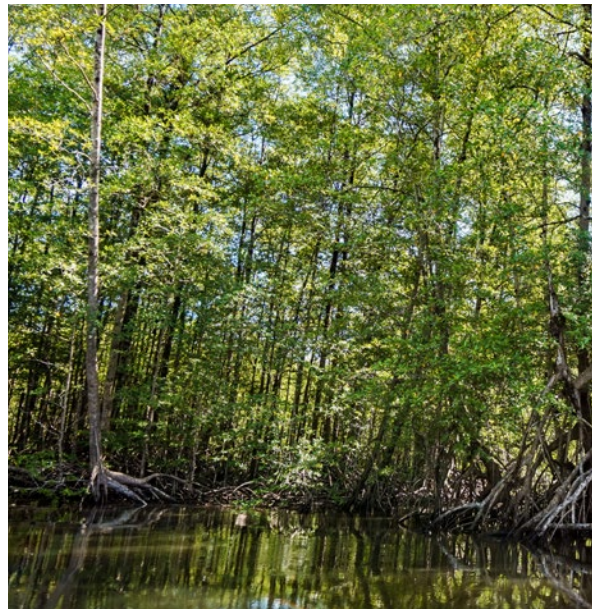
Osa Peninsula History and Wildlife

The Osa Peninsula



The Osa Peninsula and its surroundings are an idyllic and remote destination for nature-lovers, adventurers, scientists, and photographers. It boasts around 2.5% of the world's biodiversity, borders the largest mangrove forest in Costa Rica, and contains endless recreation opportunities. The Peninsula comprises the largest stretch of continuous tropical forest on the Pacific Coast of Central America, and has been recognized since the 1970s as a priority zone for conservation. The biodiversity of the Osa includes 140 mammal species, more than 400 bird

species, 700 tree species, and an astounding 250,000 species overall. Of these, 323 species are found nowhere else on Earth. This enormous diversity of life is mainly preserved in protected areas, including the Terraba-Sierpe National Wetlands, Corcovado National Park (the largest and most famous reserve on the peninsula), Golfo Dulce Forest Reserve, Caño Island Biological Reserve, and many other private and public protected areas that cover land or ocean.



What makes the Osa Peninsula such a hotspot for diversity? In addition to the favorable climate and productive soils, there are 13 different ecological regions that span marine, coastal, freshwater, mangrove, estuary, and rainforest environments. This broad range of habitat types allows vast numbers of plants and animals to survive here, while also providing

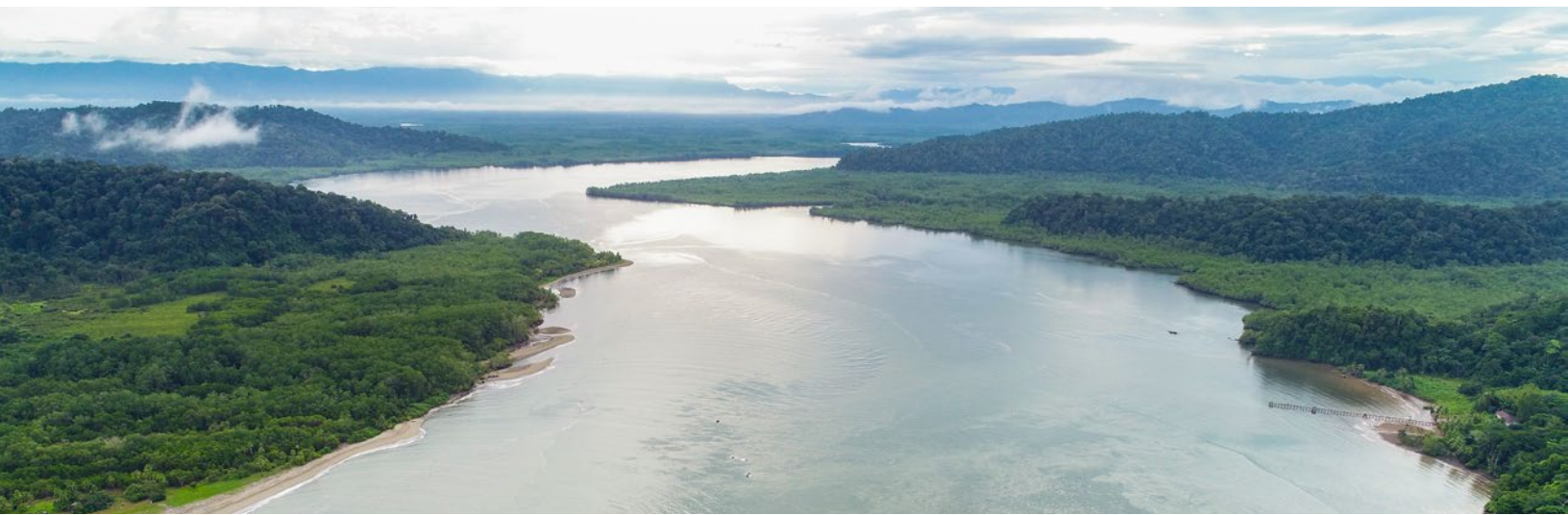


excellent outdoor recreation or educational opportunities. Offshore of the Osa Peninsula, marine species often gather in large numbers near the continental shelf drop-off, including huge pods of spinner dolphins and pelagic fish. Not far from the Peninsula lies Caño Island, a special place for snorkelers, divers and scientists alike that is home to a diversity of marine life, including sharks, turtles, whales, and more than 200 species of fish.



The Osa Peninsula has remained scenic and undeveloped despite the tourist industry's expansion in the rest of Costa Rica. The region had no electricity until 2004, and no internet service until 2010. Grassroots and government agencies fought for the creation of protected areas in the Osa Peninsula so that it might avoid the same fate as northern Costa Rica, which saw rampant and uncontrolled development for tourism after the infrastructure for such activities were installed. Luckily, the Osa Peninsula is already largely protected, and eco-tourism is helping to make growth sustainable for the people and animals that rely on the land and sea for survival. The Osa Peninsula of today is one of the last remote areas of Costa Rica, but that may change in the years to come.





Sierpe River

The Sierpe River originates from deep within the vibrant jungles at the northeastern edge of the Osa Peninsula. The river snakes its way 48 km (30 miles) out to the Pacific Ocean in a maze of winding, interconnected stream channels that lend it the name “Sierpe,” which



means “serpent” in Spanish. By the time it reaches the ocean, the Sierpe River spreads out to more than a kilometer wide. Both the Sierpe and Terraba rivers meander their way to the sea through the Terraba Sierpe National Wetlands (Spanish: Humedal Nacional Térraba-Sierpe), the largest contiguous mangrove forest in Costa Rica and one of the largest in Central America. Six species of unique salt-tolerant trees form the peaceful mangrove forests that are home to a diversity of birds, mammals, insects, amphibians, reptiles, and fishes.



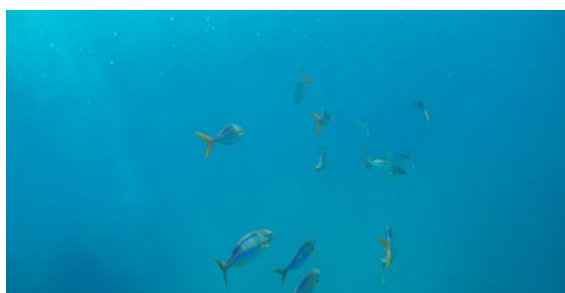
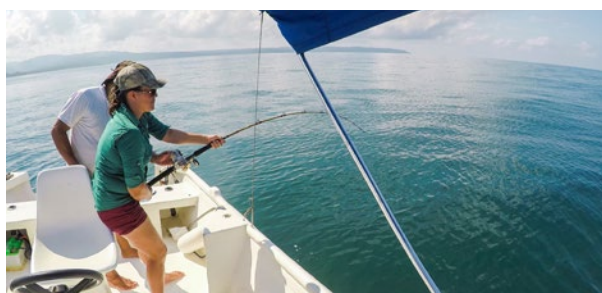
The town of Sierpe separates the headwaters from the lower reaches of the river about 12 miles inland from the river mouth, or “boca del río” in Spanish. Despite its remoteness, the town of Sierpe is frequented by tourists who come to see the mangrove forests and by Osa locals stocking up on supplies. It is also essentially the “end of the road” for most travelers on the Pacific side of southern Costa

Rica. Some visitors stay in Sierpe to explore the local mangrove forests by kayak or boat, visit the cultural museums, or take one of the nature tours. However, to explore the reefs, secluded beaches, and pristine jungles of the Osa Peninsula, visitors need to take a river



boat from Sierpe to stay at one of the remote eco lodges such as Casa Roja, where people spend their time venturing to Caño Island, Drake Bay, and Corcovado National Park.

Even though both are very remote, the mouth of the Sierpe River is quite different from its forested headwaters. Downstream from the town of Sierpe, the river widens meanders through sandbars and expansive mangrove forest. Closer to the ocean, the river sometimes flows in the opposite direction during an incoming tide. As the tides recede, incoming swells can create choppy conditions at the mouth of the river, but local captains are experts at crossing “la boca.” The Sierpe River is the gateway to adventure in the Osa Peninsula. Whether you are in search of surfing, kayaking, culture, hiking, fishing, or wildlife viewing, you are sure to find it here.



History and Culture

Costa Rica was originally inhabited by various indigenous groups, including the native Boruca people that historically ruled the Osa Peninsula. Today, about 2,000 members of the tribe still live in an indigenous reserve located about 14 miles northeast of the Osa Peninsula in the Talamanca Mountains. The Boruca culture is known for brightly-painted masks, the annual Dance of the Devil festival, and colorful stories of local folklore. The Dance of the Devil festival takes place around December 30–January 2 in the Boruca community, and features dancers wearing masks that look like devils to represent the Boruca culture, as well as a person wearing a bull costume to represent the Spanish conquistadors. Visitors

can experience the Boruca culture by taking a bus or car to the village (33 kilometers from Palmar Norte). Spartan overnight lodging and amenities are available and the small town accommodates hundreds of visitors during festival times.

When the Spanish conquistadors came to Costa Rica in the 1500s, most other native tribes besides the Boruca eventually assimilated Spanish customs into their own traditions, and the “Tico” culture of today’s Costa Rica was born. Many locals in Costa Rica, especially in rural areas, still survive as they have for thousands of years, by living off the abundance of the land and sea. However, things have changed dramatically for some, and change is just on the horizon for others. In areas such as Guanacaste and other popular beach towns, rampant and irresponsible development for international tourism has displaced locals. The Tico culture is almost gone from those areas because few Ticos remain there.



Development has been much slower to reach the Osa Peninsula, and because of that, it still supports the last virgin rainforests and conserved coastlines on the Pacific side of Central America. The locals have lived simply by mining for gold, logging, fishing, and hunting in the jungles on the Osa Peninsula. But in 1985, gold mining was banned in Corcovado National Park, leaving many locals without income. Officials stress the need for sustainable development and tourism in the region in order to avoid a fate similar to Guanacaste, and some hunters have become the best wildlife guides. However, many locals are still struggling with the shift. They understand the value of their homeland and the creatures in it, but much of the tourism profits never reach them. With help from groups such as Caminos de Osa, Turismo Rural Comunitario de Osa, Conservation Association of Dos Brazos de Río Tigre, and Lokal Travel, locals can host tours and house guests in their homes, helping tourists experience Tico culture. This new sort of immersive ecotourism of the Osa Peninsula is helping local communities preserve and share their unique culture, way of life, and natural resources.



Wildlife of the Osa Peninsula

A visit to the most “biologically intense” place in the world is bound to produce a fleeting glimpse or close encounter with unusual or unfamiliar animals, plants, fungi, or insects. The Osa Peninsula is home to a staggering 250,000 species, including 323 endemic plants and animals not found anywhere else on Earth. The region’s iconic wildlife is sure to inspire first-time visitors, whether with awe, fear, or fascination. The animals you spot will vary depending on the season and your activities, but during a stay of only one or two weeks, you are likely to complete an impressive wildlife checklist.



Among the region’s 140 species of mammals are tapirs, coatis, capuchin monkeys, spider monkeys, howler monkeys, sloths, and even pumas and jaguars. Birds are abundant at all times of the year, and the region’s more than 400 species include scarlet macaws, toucans, parrots, ibises, herons, trogons, and caracaras. About a dozen bird species live only on the Osa Peninsula and just beyond it, such as the black-cheeked ant tanager that can be seen in Corcovado National Park. Common amphibians and reptiles include frogs, toads, iguanas, crocodiles, snakes, geckos and anoles. Some of the region’s 6,000 insects are impressively large, such as wandering spiders, rhinoceros beetles, and katydids. The lush plant life of the region is

also extraordinary. The Osa Peninsula is home to 700 species of trees, at least 20 of which are unique to the region. During a walk through any forest, be sure to observe the profusion of tropical flowers, vines, mosses, and fungi that surround you.

The Osa Peninsula’s marine environments are also as wild and spectacular as its terrestrial ones. The Golfo Dulce, which borders the eastern side of the Peninsula, is a unique deep embayment that is like a tropical fjord. Whale sharks occasionally gather in the gulf, and a new sub-species of marine snake was recently discovered there. Not far from the Osa Peninsula lies Caño Island, home to a resident population of white-tip reef sharks, bluefin trevallies, and schools of barracudas, among others. Marine species often gather in large numbers at the edge of the continental shelf, including huge pods of spinner dolphins and large schools of yellowfin tuna, and humpback whales can be observed in nearly all months of the year. Even orcas occasionally visit Costa Rican open waters!



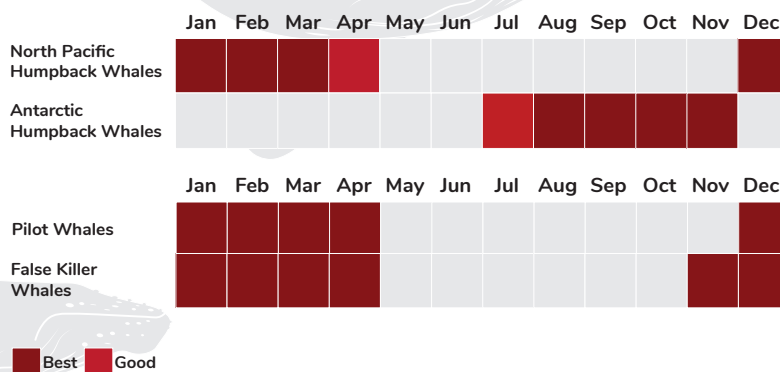
While plenty of stunning species can be spotted right from the decks of Casa Roja, taking a tour with a local guide will ensure that you see the most wildlife, since many animals are hard to spot without an expert eye. Guides can also enhance your experience by offering information on the natural history, uses, and possible dangers of the plants and animals you encounter. Although beautiful, some of Costa Rica's wildlife is also deadly, and it is important to maintain a safe distance during your excursions, while also familiarizing yourself with some of the wildlife hazards you may encounter. Animal sightings are sure to be among your most memorable experiences at Casa Roja. Explore our blog posts to learn more about the Osa Peninsula's fantastic wildlife species.

Whales and Dolphins

There are two populations of humpback whales that make Costa Rica their winter destination, giving the Pacific side of Costa Rica the distinction of hosting the largest concentration of whales in the world. The Pacific population of humpback whales spend the northern hemisphere summers gorging on plankton off the shores of western north America but when winter arrives, they migrate south to the warm waters of Central America to breed, give birth and rear their young. The Antarctic population of humpbacks spend the southern hemisphere summers feeding on krill around Antarctica and when the seasons change they migrate north, the longest migration of any mammal (5,000 miles), to spend the months of July through November in Costa Rica.

Besides humpbacks, pilot whales, blue whales, Bryde's whales, and pseudo-orcas (false killer whales) frequent the Pacific Coast. Common Dolphins, Bottlenose Dolphins, Pantropical Spotted Dolphins, and Spinner Dolphins can be seen in the waters surrounding the Osa Peninsula.

Best Time to Watch Whales and Dolphins



North Pacific whales migrate to Costa Rica in December

Antarctic whales migrate to Costa Rica in July

Crocodiles



On the drive along the Coastal Highway, the Costanera Sur, south towards the Osa Peninsula, many visitors choose to stop at the bridge crossing the Tárcoles River. Here, dozens – sometimes hundreds – of massive American crocodiles bask on the muddy banks of the river, admired by tourists and locals alike. While they can grow to 20 feet in length and weigh nearly 2,000 pounds, most crocodiles are much smaller.

But the Tárcoles isn't the only river these ancient reptiles call home. In fact, crocodiles are found in most waterways close to the coast. One is bound to spot some crocs during the boat ride from Sierpe to Casa Roja, a reminder to exercise an appropriate amount of caution when near the water. However, American crocodiles aren't typically aggressive (except for mothers guarding their nests), and conflict between humans and crocodiles is rare in Costa Rica. The few incidents reported each year typically involve nighttime swimming or other aquatic activities during the times of peak crocodile activity – a few hours after dark.



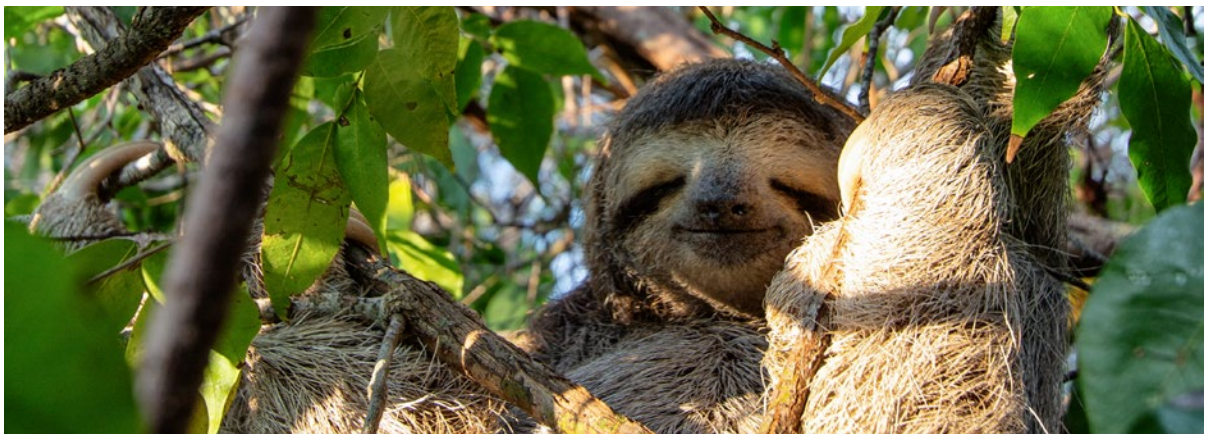
During the day, the prehistoric behemoths of Costa Rica's rivers are generally inactive, basking in the sun and digesting their previous night's meal of bird, fish, turtles or small mammals. Quite wary of approaching boats, they quickly slide from their sunning spots and disappear into the murky depths of the river when observers come too close for their comfort.



Sloths

Sloths (sp. Perezoso; lit. “lazy”) are perhaps the most charismatic and beloved wildlife in Costa Rica. Adorable, with a seemingly perpetual smiley expression and living life in slow motion, seeing a sloth at some point during their stay ranks high on the list of nearly all visitors, but sightings are far from guaranteed.

Two species of sloth, the brown-throated sloth (with three “fingers” on their front limbs) and Hoffman’s two-toed sloth, can be found in Costa Rica’s forests. The latter – and larger of the two species – is nocturnal and rarely seen. The brown-throated sloths are also active during the day (though active is hardly an appropriate description) and more easily spotted by vacationers. Their sloooooow movements and brown, sometimes algae-covered, fur effectively conceals sloths from their predators and naturalists. Among the reasons for their leisurely pace is their incredibly slow metabolism – a meal can take about three weeks to make it through a sloth! They have evolved to do less, rather than eat more, and spend most of their lives sleeping (up to 20 hours each day!) high in the forest canopy, far from most predators and without the need for fast movement.



Although sloths can make an appearance anywhere, anytime in Costa Rica, those intent on coming face to smiley-face with a sloth best rely on a naturalist guide apt at spotting these fur balls in the crowns of trees. The mangrove-lined channels of Isla Violín, a short boat ride across the river from Casa Roja, offer an excellent opportunity to see sloths, often several at once. For the best chance at good pictures, go during high tide, when the boat is a few feet closer to the tree tops!



We hope this brief orientation has provided information, inspiration and ideas to help making your visit an unforgettable one. Thank you for choosing Casa Roja, and *pura vida*.