COSTA RICA PROTECTED ÁREAS

1. Parque Nacional Santa Rosa
2. Parque Nacional Guanacaste
3. Parque Nacional Marino Las Baulas y Refugio de Vida Silvestre Tamarindo
4. Reserva Nacional Absoluta de Cabo Blanco
5. Parque Nacional Barra Honda
6. Parque Nacional Palo Verde
7. Reserva Biológica Lomas Barbudal
8. Refugio de Vida Silvestre Ostional
9. Parque Nacional Carara
10. Parque Nacional Manuel Antonio
11. Parque Nacional Ballena
12. Reserva Biológica de Isla del Caño
13. Parque Nacional Corcovado
14. Refugio de Vida Silvestre Gandoca-Manzanillo
15. Parque Nacional Cahuita
16. Parque Nacional Tortuguero
17. Refugio de Vida Silvestre Barra del Colorado
18. Refugio de Vida Silvestre Caño Negro
19. Parque Nacional Rincón de la Vieja
20. Parque Nacional Arenal
21. Parque Nacional Volcán Poás
22. Parque Nacional Braulio Carrillo
23. Parque Nacional Volcán Irazú
24. Monumento Nacional de Guayabo
25. Parque Nacional Orosí (Tapanti)
26. InterParque Nacional La Amistad
27. Reserva Biológica Hitoy-Cerere
28. Parque Nacional Chirripó
29. Refugio de Vida Silvestre Golfito
30. Refugio de Vida Silvestre Isla Bolaños
31. Reserva Biológica Islas Guayabo, Negritos y Pájaros
32. Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre Curú
33. Parque Nacional Juan Castro Blanco
34. Parque Nacional Isla del Coco
1-Santa Rosa National Park

**Size:** 49,515 hectares.
**Distance from San José:** 260 kilometers.
**Trails:** Yes, from 1 to 20 km.
**Dry season:** January through March.

Santa Rosa National Park was created in 1971 to commemorate and preserve the historical setting of the Battle of Santa Rosa (March 20, 1856) including the historical mansion and the stonewall corrals. Moreover, it protects the savannah and deciduous forest, marshlands, and mangroves, and abundant animal life, including several endangered species. It also has lovely recreational beaches.

Much has changed since then, Santa Rosa National Park now protects remaining fragments of tropical dry forest, housing many different species of flora and fauna, such as coyotes, peccaries, coati mundis, tapirs, jaguarundy, margay, jaguars, ocelots, armadillo, and many varieties of sea and land turtles.
You can expect to find wooden savanna on both sides of the entrance road and all throughout the park. These grasslands are not a natural occurrence, but the result of extensive slash and burn practices.

There is a new addition to the park, the Murcielago or "Bat" section, located in the southeast of the town called Cuajiniquil, on the Santa Elena Peninsula, consisting mostly of spectacular rocky peaks and valleys, which currently are undergoing serious ecological reforestation efforts.
2-Guanacaste National Park

Size: 700 square kilometres.
Distance from San José: 280 kilometers.
Camping: Permitted.
Trails: Yes.
Dry season: January to March

Guanacaste National Park, located on the east side of the Interamerican Highway across from Santa Rosa National Park, was created in 1989 to protect the volcano slope evergreen forest and the Orosi and Cacao volcanoes’ cloud forests. This project was founded to help secure a migration route for those animals that move into the highlands during the dry season. The park contains several interesting trails and four research stations, of which at least one will remain open for tourists, researchers and photographers. In December 1999, the Area de Conservación Guanacaste was declared by the UNESCO as a Natural Heritage Site of Humanity.

Wildlife in the park is varied; 140 species of mammals, over 300 birds, 100 amphibians and reptiles, and over 10,000 species of insects have been identified. The most common mammals are howler monkeys, white-faced capuchins, long-nosed armadillos and coatis. There are also collared peccaries, pocket mice, white-tailed deer, pumas, ocelots, black hawks, and many others.
Positioned at the foot of the Orosi volcano lies Maritza Biological Station where one can find hills that are relics of Plio-Cuaternary volcanoes and plains formed by the accumulation of ash, pyroclasts and ignimbrites. The western slope of these volcanoes is covered with evergreen rain forests. Trees here can grow up to 30 meters in height, and the predominating species are the Santa María, Tempisque and the Monkey Apple.

### 3-Las Baulas National Park

**Size:** 612 hectares.
**Distance from San José:** 321 kilometers.
**Trails:** Yes. Along the beach
**Dry Season:** January through March.
Four hundred and forty hectares of this park consist of a mangrove swamp at Tamarindo. There are six known species of mangrove that grow on this pacific coast, where an abundance of black mangrove can be found, suggesting concentrations of salt in the soil of Tamarindo swamp.

Playa Grande is a very important nesting beach for the leatherback turtle (Baula is the Spanish name for this species). This is the world’s largest and most wide-ranging sea turtle, nesting in beaches from Surinam to Malaysia and some individuals have been found as far north as Iceland and Scandinavia. Leatherbacks arrive at Tamarindo in early October and nest until March, with the peak of activity occurring during November and December.

Pottery has been found at the archeological sites of Matapalo and Herta Aguacate, adjacent to the park. The artifacts found are mainly bowls of different sizes that are decorated with blackish coffee colored engobe, and complicated geometrical designs.
The park is located on the Nicoya peninsula, near the town of Salinas, heading on Highway 21 to Filadelphia (26 kilometers), then 25 kilometers to Huacas and finally 8 more to Matapalo on a dirt road.

4-Cabo Blanco Absolute Reserve

Size: 1,172 hectares in-land and 1,700 hectares in the ocean.
Distance from San José: 300 kilometers.
Trails: Yes.
Dry Season: November through April.
Cabo Blanco Biological Reserve, established in 1963, is the only government protected area created before the inception of the park service in 1970 that has survived to this day.

The reserve occupies the southernmost tip of the Nicoya peninsula and protects the largest tract of an extremely important example of mixed evergreen and deciduous moist tropical forest in the area.

The place is home to many rare and threatened species, including curassows, crested guan, brocket deer and jaguarundi, along with some more common species like howler monkeys, raccoons and kinkajous. There are excellent tide pools along the coast, and Isla Cabo Blanco is a very important seabird-breeding site.
Barra Honda National Park was created in 1971 to protect its famous cave systems. Although most of the park has been cut over in the past, wildlife is fairly abundant and increasing with protection. A good trail system takes the visitors to the caves, where unusual limestone formations offer spectacular views. The park is located east of the town of Nicoya, on the northern part of the Nicoya Peninsula.
Barra Honda Peak has a vast system of independent caves, nearly 42, of which only 19 have been explored. This caverns are renowned for their pristine condition and conservation efforts have helped to retain all the geo-biological features of the area. Vertical entrances to the caves require special equipment and trained professionals.

There is little variety of wildlife, some resident species are white faced capuchin monkeys, coyotes, armadillos and skunks, as well as snakes and reptiles.

The park service personnel (radio # 33-4070) can take you in and out of caves, or guide you on how to do this and where to go once in the park.
6-Palo Verde National Park

**Size:** 18,418 hectares.
**Distance from San José:** 240 kilometers.
**Camping:** Permitted.
**Trails:** Yes.
**Dry season:** January through March.

Palo Verde National Park protects a portion of what is called the Río Tempisque lowlands, an amazingly diverse patchwork of habitats, including freshwater and saltwater marshes, deciduous, riparian and evergreen forests; and mangrove swamps.

The marshes are an extremely important stopover point for migratory animals and in January and February the largest concentration of wading birds in Central America can be found here.
The park's many birds migrate to the region during the dry season, including storks, egrets, ibis, grebes and spoonbills. Pajaros Island (Isla de Pajaros), in the middle of the Tempisque River, is particularly eye-catching as it is home to many exotic bird species. The island is the largest nesting site for the black-crowned night-herons in Costa Rica and boasts other avian exotics such as the great curassow, toucans and macaws.

The Catalina sector of the park, in the northeast area, contains interesting primary forest, but no trails per se. It's common to see animals like pizotes, querques, collared peccaries, coatis, white tailed deer, spotted skunks, white-face monkeys, iguanas and many more.
7-Lomas Barbudal Biological Reserve  
"The insects Park"

**Size:** 2.279 hectares.  
**Distance from San José:** 219 kilometers.  
**Trails:** Yes.  
**Dry season:** January through March

Lomas Barbudal is often referred as the "insect park", because of the immense variety of insects found here, 240 species of bees have been recorded, along with 60 species of moths.

The reserve protects interesting examples of dry tropical forest, along with patches of evergreen and riparian forests. Several species of endangered trees can also be found here, like mahogany and redwood, as well as the Panama redwood.

There is a refreshing swimming hole, or "poza" as it's called in spanish, containing many different fish, and if you bring a mask and snorkel it's well worth taking a look around. This "oasis" is located 300 meters upstream from the visitors center.
This reserve is located on the southwest part of Bagaces, north of Liberia, in the Guanacaste province.

At the reserve, if you are lucky, you will know the person who used to guard and protect this beautiful place (voluntary) Don Daniel, an old dedicated simple man. He is very funny and a real kind person; worry about the reserve protection and preservation. If you stay enough time, you will hear from him a lot of very interesting stories about the zone and his own life.

At the reserve you will find a lot of beautiful birds like the Trogon and the Trogon Elegante, mammals like dears, white faced monkeys, haulers monkeys (congos), coati mundi (or pizotes), deers, guatuzas (kind of big rodent), Owls, and a lot of reptiles.

9-Carara National Park

Size: 4.700 hectares.
Distance from San José: 110 kilometers.
Trails: Yes.
Dry Season: November through April.
Carara National Park is a must for anyone interested in tropical biology. Its high species diversity and ease of access make this a worthwhile trip from San José, or on the way to points further south. The park is located between the dry forests of the north and the humid ones of the south and it is the result of this situation in an "ecotone" or melding area that gives Carara its diversity. There are trails that go through both zones where you can appreciate the forest's exuberance and if lucky enough spot some animal species which inhabit it.

Many endangered and threatened species live and breed here, like the American crocodile. Carara is also considered a sanctuary of the rare and beautiful Scarlet Macaw, the park's symbol which is on the endangered list. In the park there are approx 200 couples which live and breed in absolute freedom.

The word "Carara" is an indigenous term, reputedly meaning "river of crocodiles". The area in which the reserve is located was occupied by an indigenous culture that is thought to have been allied with groups located in the Central Valley from 300 B.C. to 1500 A.D. Extensive tomb sites have been excavated here, and the burial places of people of high status are remarkably complex.

The best time to visit Carara is early in the morning or late in the afternoon.

Park hours are 7:00 am to 4:00 pm.
10-Manuel Antonio National Park

Size: 682 hectares.
Distance from San José: 132 kilometers.
Trails: Yes.
Dry season: December through March

Manuel Antonio National Park, lying on the pacific coast 7 kilometers south of the town of Quepos between Damas and Matapalos, was created in 1972 at a time when the area was poised for massive tourism development, founded primarily by foreign interests. The land constituting the park had, by then, gone through several different foreign owners. Today, the park protects a beautiful remnant piece of the tropical forest that once covered a wide variety of marine life.
With one of the most stunning, picture-postcard backdrops in the country, this is one of the lushest places in Costa Rica, with spectacular white-grey sand beaches fringed by thickly forested green hills. There is a huge variety of things to do- walking the Park's easy trails, whitewater rafting, ocean cruising, horseback riding, fishing, sea kayaking, to name but a few.

Manuel Antonio is one of Costa Rica's best known and most often visited park, despite the fact that it's also the smallest. The park is an island of verdant wildness in a rapidly developing area with a relatively intact wet tropical forest and abundant wildlife.

This park has a remarkably long list of species inhabiting it: brown pelicans, brown boobies, tyrant hawk-eagles, gray-headed chachalacas, solater's ant bird, coatimundis, two and three toed sloths, toed anteaters, ocelots amongst others.
11-Ballena National Park

Size: 110 hectares of beach and coast and 5,400 hectares of sea.
Distance from San José: 192 kilometers.
Trails: None.
Dry Season: January through March.

Ballena National Park is one of Costa Rica’s newest national parks, created in an attempt to conserve some of the marine resources of the South Pacific region, which are under siege from over fishing and unchecked tourism development. Bordered on the south by Punta Piñuela, then extending out to sea for 9 kilometers, heading north 6 kilometers before coming back to shore at Punta Uvita in the southern end of Playa Hermosa, the park is ideal for scuba diving and beachcombing activities as it includes open ocean, islands and long, wide beaches.
Several species of whales have been reported in or near Ballena National Park, which gets its name from the Spanish word for whale, "ballena". Melon-headed whales, sperm whales, as well as common striped and spinner dolphins are regularly spotted. More species are sure to be recorded here, as more complete studies are under way.

Ballena National Park is bordered on the south by Punta Piñuela, and extends out to sea for 9 kilometers, heading north 6 kilometers before coming back to shore at Punta Uvita, in the southern end of Playa Hermosa.

12-Isla del Caño Biological Reserve
Caño Island Biological Reserve lying about 20 kilometers off the Osa peninsula, northeast of Corcovado National Park, is a site of great archeological interest. The island was once used as a pre-Colombian cemetery by cultures with a clear South American influence and it's still possible to see some of the perfectly round stone spheres made by the former natives of this land.

Wildlife is scarce, consisting mainly of insects like bees, moths, beetles and mosquitoes, as well as some frogs and small lizards. Small vertebrates such as; pacas, opossums, pigs and cattle egrets (the predominant bird species), are also found here.
The island is surrounded by five platforms of low coral reefs. Camping areas have been established, near the ranger station, where you can also find potable water.

It rises 110 meters above sea level, and it's composed mainly of small white sandy beaches, that sometimes disappear with the high tide.

The greatest attractions of Caño Island lie beneath the waters surrounding the island. Skin Diver magazine has rated the site as among the best in the world and one of the newest hot spots for adventure diving. This virgin area offers a variety of unique diving attractions, from 15 - 16' reefs to 80' "walls".

The rock formations are volcanic origins; sea fans, cup coral, head corals are the most common. Because of its status as a Biological Reserve the diving in Caño Island is regulated.

Only 10 divers maximum and 5 dive sites are open to the public. By law, it is totally prohibited to remove any marine objects dead or alive (shells, corals, etc.). Although the currents and visibility are difficult to predict, the latter is usually outstanding and rarely gets below 50'. The name of the game here is "SHARKS"! Lots of them (white-tips) ranging in size from 6-10' as well as sea turtles, dolphins, stingrays, morays, and huge snapper and grouper. This could very well be mainland Costa Rica's finest diving spot! Find out more about diving at Caño Island NOW!!!
Corcovado National Park, located in the Osa peninsula, in the southwest corner of the country is an undeniably beautiful place, considered to be one of the most important natural preserves in the Americas. This virgin rain forest park invites superlatives from all who visit. The captivating visual beauty of its forest and of its coastline, with miles of uninhabited beaches and roaring cascades, draws visitors from all over the world.

There are 8 main habitats in this park, mountain forest, cloud forest, alluvial plains, swamp and holillo forest, fresh water herbaceous swamp, mangrove swamp and a rocky coastline.

At least thirteen distinct vegetation types can be seen in close proximity, including mangroves, palm swamps and blood weed forest making Corcovado a botanist's dream.
With 500 species of trees, 140 species of mammals, 367 species of birds, 40 species of freshwater fishes and 117 species of amphibians recorded here, it is easy to understand why Corcovado National Park has been called "the most biologically intense place on Earth" by National Geographic.

Jaguars, giant anteaters, hundreds of white-lipped peccaries, tapers, red brocket deer, margay cats, spider monkeys, and a host of rare rain forest animals inhabit the vast reaches while poisonous frogs, snakes, and other lizards live surrounding the crocodile-filled lagoon at the park's center.

The foundation beneath Corcovado consists of pillow basalts and gabros, possibly 50 to 56 million years old, however sedimentary layers have been uncovered which date as far back as 65 to 70 million years old. The park is located in the Osa peninsula, in the southwest corner of the country.
15-Cahuita National Park

**Size:** 5.303 hectares.  
**Distance from San José:** 241 kilometers.  
**Trails:** Yes.  
**Dry Season:** February, March, June, September and October.

Cahuita National Park is located just south of the town of Cahuita, about 43 kilometers south of Limón, on the Caribbean coastline in one of the most beautiful and scenic regions in Costa Rica. Its main attractions are the white sand beaches fringed with endless coconut trees, a calm sea of transparent waters and the coral reefs just offshore.

The most attractive feature for divers is the underwater garden of marine life, including several types of coral, such as the brain and elkhorn coral. Also living in this medium are large numbers of very colorful tropical fish and invertebrates, like urchins, sea fans, angelfish, blue parrotfish, barracudas and stingrays, amongst others.

There's also a great variety of land and air animals, such as raccoons, crabs (land and water), howler monkeys, kingfishers, night herons, white-nosed coatis, frogs, toads and snakes.
Most of Cahuita consists of a swamp located in the depression that lies between the coral platform and the mainland. Other habitats in the park are uninundated mixed forest and littoral woodlands.

The most interesting feature of the park is a shipwreck located on the north of the mouth of the river Perezoso, which sank in the 18th century and was used to transport slaves.

16-Tortuguero National Park

Size: 26,156 hectares.
Distance from San José: 254 kilometers by land and water.
Trails: Limited.
Dry season: February through March.
Tortuguero National Park, located in the northeast part of Costa Rica’s Atlantic coast, is one of Costa Rica’s best known parks, and not without a reason. Besides being the most important nesting site for the green turtle (July to October), in the entire western half of the Caribbean, it also serves as a refuge for other turtles, such as leatherbacks, and hawkbills.

One of the country's most popular eco tourism destinations, the canals, rivers, beaches, and lakes of Tortuguero National Park "Costa Rica's Amazon" are a working laboratory of rain forest, freshwater, and marine biology.

The wildlife here is rich and varied. There are unusually large populations of monkeys, amphibians, birds and fish. Resident fauna include the tapir, ocelots, jaguars, collared peccaries, river otters, sloths, grisons (furry, weasel-like mammal native to Mexico, Central America, and South America), frogs, macaws, toucans, and the fascinating bulldog bats which feed on fish.

The park and the refuge consist of a vast alluvial floodplain formed by the coalescence of deltas from rivers, twisting and meandering into the ancient Nicaraguan Trench. The location of the area makes it one of the wettest regions in the country.
The flora in this area is also very rich and abundant. Some of the species found in this region are crab wood, coconut trees, banak, tamarind, bully tree, orchids, hollio palm, and heliconias.

17-Barra del Colorado Wildlife Refuge

**Size:** 92,000 hectares.

**Distance from San José:** 99 kilometers by airplane.

**Trails:** Limited.

**Dry Season:** February; March, and April.
Barra del Colorado Wildlife Refuge is located in the north east corner of Costa Rica bordering Nicaragua alongsides the San Juan river, and next to Tortuguero National Park.

The two sides of the river are remarkably different. The Nicaraguan side is covered with dense primary forest, in sharp contrast to Costa Rica’s side, where the forest has long ago fallen before the chainsaw and what remains are big wetland forest and swamps, that become vast alluvial floodplains during the rainy season.

The wildlife here is varied, large populations of monkeys and birds can be see throughout the park. There are also some unusual amphibians which abound on the banks of streams, like the smoky and the glass frogs.

Take advantage of the chance to explore this wilderness area throughout many days, either if you are an experienced explorer or not, there are guides and plenty of room where to camp and many wet portions of the reserve remain largely untouched.

One interesting phenomenon peculiar to the San Juan River is the migration of Bull Sharks, from the Atlantic Ocean upriver to Lake Nicaragua. It’s not clearly known why these relatives of the great white shark make the trip or how they adapt to the salinity changes in the water.
18-Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge

**Size:** 9.969 hectares.
**Distance from San José:** 291 kilometers.
**Trails:** Limited.
**Dry Season:** January through April.

This wilderness area of this park is made up of a big lake and the marshlands surrounding it, made by alluvial sediments. It covers an expanse of approximately 800 hectares and its 3 meters deep. During the dry season the lake almost dries up completely.

This refuge is gaining popularity amongst nature oriented tourists. The reason is that the lake fills at the beginning of the rainy season with the runoff from the river Frio. This natural phenomenon creates a perfect environment for birds to procreate, thus providing a bird-watcher’s paradise.
The variety of birdlife is astounding, in this park the visitor can find spoonbills, white ibis, northern jacana, woodstork, jaribu (which is the largest bird, and seriously endangered), ducks, and cattle egret. The refuge also protects the only permanent population of Nicaraguan grackle, an endemic bird of the Lake Nicaragua Basin.

There are also many endangered animals being protected here like pumas, jaguars, ocelots and caymans, as well as some more common species such as monkeys, peccaries, raccoons, otters, sloths and deer.

The refuge lies close to the settlement of the Malekus, direct descendants of the Guatuso Indians that once lived in the area. This reserve is located 165 kilometers straight north from San José, southeast of the town of Los Chiles, near the Nicaraguan border.
19-Rincón de la Vieja National Park

**Size:** 14,084 hectares.
**Distance from San José:** 264 kilometers.
**Trails:** Yes.
**Dry season:** January through March.

Rincon de la Vieja is a strato volcano that soars 1,916 meters above sea level and spreads over 400 square kilometers. It was formed by the simultaneous explosion of several volcanic cones that grew and merged into a single mountain. It has been possible to identify 9 sites of volcanic activity on the summit. One is active and the others are slowly eroding.
Hot springs form small streams with very hot water. Solfataric lakes (containing sulfur dioxide) fill small hollows with constantly bubbling muddy water. There's also vapor holes, which become specially active during the rainy season.

Studies carried out in the park have identified 257 species of birds, including the three-wattled bellbird and the emerald toucanet.

There's also a small amount of mammals that live in the park, like deer, peccaries, sloths, pumas and tapirs.

Rincon de la vieja is located northeast of Liberia, in Guanacaste. The park is usually reached by taking a 21 kilometer dirt road, best traveled on a four wheel drive vehicle.
20-Arenal Volcano National Park

**Size:** 12,060 hectares

The most characteristic feature of this national park is the impressive and majestic Arenal Volcano, an almost perfect active cone 1,633 meters high, whose regular eruptions offer one of the most extraordinary and awe inspiring natural sights in Costa Rica.
The four most important types of vegetation in the park are the perennial wet and very wet forests that cover about 47% of the area. There's also cloud forest and riverine woodlands, where several endemic species can be found, like the brunelia costaricensis and the epiphytic pineapple.

Thirty-five species of fish, 135 species of reptiles that include tortoises, snakes and lizards, and 131 known species of mammals can be found here. An amazing 53% of the species that make up the national bird population are also found here making this park and the surrounding area a birdwatcher's paradise.

21-Poas National Park

**Size:** 5,599 hectares.  
**Distance from San José:** 37 kilometers.  
**Trails:** Yes.  
**Dry season:** December through April.
Poas is an strato volcano that soars 2,708 meters above sea level. It is one of the most spectacular volcanoes in Costa Rica, with a breathtaking scenery. It has also produced excellent soil for cultivation and has considerable potential for producing energy from hydrological and geothermal resources.

Besides the main crater, Botos Lake and the von Frantzius cone, there are at least half a dozen piroclastic cones in the surrounding savannah woodland of Redonda and Bajos del Tigre. These cones are made of ash, lapilli, fusiform bombs and small lava flows.

There are four main habitats in the park, areas with little or no vegetation, an area of arrayans, a stunted forest, and a cloud forest. Examples of the flora include small cypress, tucuico, small cedar and small cypres. The dwarf forest predominates in this area.
There are some mammals that live in the park. These include marmots (which are marsupials), shrews that are amongst the smallest mammals in the world, bats and over 79 avian species like sooty robins, black guan, quetzal and the emerald toucanet.

The park is located northeast of the city of Alajuela, which is situated near San Jose, in the Central Valley.

22-Braulio Carrillo National Park

Size: 45.899 hectares.
Distance from San José: 23 kilometers.
Trails: Yes.
Dry Season: From the two last weeks of December through April.

This park is named after Dr. Braulio Carrillo, a national benefactor and the third president of Costa Rica. The park lies in one of the most rugged regions in the country. Almost the entire terrain is a jumble of towering volcanic mountains.
The vegetation in the park consist of a very thick evergreen forest with a highly complex structure. The composition of the forest changes depending on environmental conditions, such as terrain, drainage, temperature, cloud cover and rainfall. Most of the park is covered with primary forest, trees, ferns, heliconias and a large number of palm trees.

There is a wealth of wildlife, especially birds. Some of the resident mammals are howler, spider and white-faced monkeys, tapir, jaguar, puma, paca, white-tailed deer, porcupine and sloths.

Braulio Carrillo National Park is located 20 kilometers northeast of San José. The part of Braulio Carrillo that most people see is the southern area on either side of the Siquirres Highway on the Atlantic Coast.

23-Irazu Volcano National Park

Size: 2.309 hectares.
Distance from San José: 54 kilometers.
Trails: Very Limited.
Dry season: December through April.
Irazu, or "the Powder Keg of Nature" as it has been called, is an active strato volcano with an irregular sub conical shape. It towers 3,432 meters above sea level and spreads over 500 square kilometers.

There are four craters at the summit of Irazu, the main crater, another one named Diego de la Haya, and two small craters located on the northwest and southeast areas of the park.

The vegetation has undergone considerable alteration due to the eruptions. Today it's possible to see areas with sparse plant growth within the rim of the craters. Elsewhere it's possible to find of secondary forest and patches of primary forest.

Wildlife in Irazu is very scarce. Some of the mammals that have been seen near the summit are the eastern cottontail (species of rabbit), coyotes, armadillos, porcupine, weasels and tiger cats. As far as birds is concerned, hummingbirds woodpeckers and mountain robins are a common sight, unlike the eastern meadowlark, and long-tailed ptinlogony that have small recorded populations.
24-Guayabo National Monument

Size: 218 hectares.
Distance from San José: 84 kilometers.
Trails: Yes.
Dry season: December through April.

Guayabo is the largest and most important archeological site discovered to date in Costa Rica. It forms part of the cultural region known as Central Intermountain and Atlantic Basin. Some of the features of the buildings point to South America, while Mesoamerican evidence is also present, a common occurrence due to the "land bridge" nature of the Central America geoposition.

The archeological importance of Guayabo has been known since the end of the last century. At that time several expeditions were carried out to collect artifacts for museums and private collections, and the complete archeological collection of Costa Rica was exhibited at the Historic-American Expo in Madrid (1982).
Open secondary vegetation grows in the areas near the archeological site as the result of logging carried out in the region many years ago. Most of the species are pioneering and include burio, guana and trumpet tree.

Wildlife is poor and scarce due to the small size of the monument. The most visible animals are birds, especially the keel-billed toucan and the Montezuma oropendola. Insects, lizards and frogs are a few frequently seen examples of the fauna.

25-Tapantí National Park

**Size:** 58,323 hectares.
**Distance from San José:** 35 kilometers.
**Camping:** Permitted.
**Trails:** Yes.
**Dry season:** January through March.
Tapantí National park, sometimes called Orosí National Park, is a National Park in the Pacific La Amistad Conservation Area of Costa Rica, located on the edge of the Talamanca range, near Cartago. Just 90 minutes drive from San José. It protects forests to the north of Chirripo National Park, and also contains part of Orosí River.

This park has two main life zones, the lower montane rain forest and the premontane rain forest. These forests are home to over 45 different species of mammals including kinkajous, tapir, deer, raccoons and monkeys.

There are also 260 kinds of birds, the most common are the quetzal, hawks, falcons, parrots and hummingbirds. Additionally, 28 species of reptiles have been identified, which include snakes, toads, frogs, and salamanders.
26-La Amistad International Park

**Size:** 193,929 hectares.
**Distance from San José:** 410 kilometers.
**Trails:** Limited.
**Dry season:** Effectively none, but December through March is dryer on the western slope.

This is Costa Rica's largest, most remote, and least known parks. Its vast upland wilderness hugs the southern part of the continental divide. Costa Rica has about half of the park, the other half being in Panama, and it represents one of the first attempts to create and manage an international protected area. In 1983, Talamanca Range-La Amistad Reserves / La Amistad National Park was declared by the *UNESCO as a Natural Heritage Site of Humanity*.

The elevation within the confines of the park ranges from 200 to 3,549 meters. One of the most interesting geomorphic discoveries made in Chirripo is the existence of several glacial features that are almost perfectly preserved.
There is an astonishing number of habitats within this vast wilderness area as a result of differences in altitude, soil, climate and topography. They include paramos, swamp, oak forest, madrono forest, fern groves, high mixed forest and very moist evergreen forest.

There's an extraordinary array of wildlife, identification has been made of 263 species of amphibians and reptiles, about 400 birds and at least 500 species of trees, alongside 130 different species of orchids. The most common animals are the tapir, jaguars, ocelots, peccaries, otters, porcupine, skunks, giant anteater and salamanders.
27-Hitoy-Cerere Biological Reserve

**Size:** 9.154 hectares.
**Distance from San José:** 219 kilometers.
**Trails:** Yes.
**Dry season:** None.

Hitoy-Cerere derives its name from two words in a local indigenous language, hitoy means "wooly", in reference to the green blanket that covers everything and cerere means, "water", because of the abundance of rivers and streams.
This park hasn't been studied in depth and it's not often visited, because of its precipitous terrain and wet climate but these two factors have produced a biological diversity that may prove to be one of the richest in Costa Rica.

The temperature is consistently warm with daytime temperatures averaging around 25 degrees C and rain is possible any time of the year.

The reserve is surrounded on three sides by indigenous people's reserves, the Telire to the west, Talamanca to the South and Tayni to the north. To the east and in the lowlands are the massive banana plantations of the Estrella valley and it is through this area that the reserve is accessible.
## 28-Chirripó National Park

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Size:</strong></th>
<th>50,150 hectares.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distance from San José:</strong></td>
<td>165 kilometers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Camping:</strong></td>
<td>Permitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trails:</strong></td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dry Season:</strong></td>
<td>December through March.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chirripó National Park, which boasts the highest peak in Costa Rica at 3,820 meters above sea level, is located near the town of San Isidro de General about 60 miles southeast of San Jose. The main route into the park is located northeast of the town of San Gerardo de Rivas.

The upper reaches of the park, often cold and almost always cloaked in mist, contain the northernmost example of the “paramo” life zone, which is typical of high-elevation plains much farther south. The park also contains extensive areas of lower montane and montane rain forest and offers excellent opportunities for wildlife observation and nature photography. Coyotes, jaguars, other felines, squirrels, rabbits, frogs, bird’s owls and quetzals are the most common species found.

Chirripó is also one of the few areas suitable for technical rock climbing.
The park experiences wide temperature variation. It can be as warm as 24 degrees C during the day and then drop to freezing at night. The altitude change between sea level and the high country is severe enough to give some people altitude sickness, particularly if they've spent a week or two in a dugout canoe or lying on the beach. It is best to plan a trip here after having spent at least a week hiking at a mid-elevation place such as Rincon de la Vieja or Monteverde to begin the process of acclimatization.

29-Golfito National Wildlife Refuge

Size: 2,810 hectares.
Distance from San José: 342 kilometers.
Camping: Permitted.
Trails: Yes.
Dry season: January to March.
The Golfito Refuge lies in a rugged wilderness area with very heavy rains. The terrain was formed by a succession of hard basalts that date 50-65 million years old.

The forest in the refuge is thick, very evergreen. A fairly common palm that grows here is the black palm. Also there's a botanical rarity found here, the quira (Carydaphnopsis burgeri), a tree that belongs to the Lauraceae family, a very primitive plant.

There are many resident mammals in this refuge, the collared peccary is a highly social animal that lives in herds. The agouti is a rodent that belongs to the same family as the paca and its helpful spreading seeds from plants. There are also raccoons, coati, rats and some reptiles like frogs and snakes.
30-Isla Bolaños National Wildlife Refuge

**Size:** 25 hectares.  
**Distance from San José:** 281 kilometers.  
**Trails:** Around the Island.  
**Dry season:** January through March.

Bolaños Island is an oval-shaped rocky mound, 81 meters high, that lies 1.5 kilometers off Punta Descartes, on the northwest region of the country. Its rugged terrain consists of numerous layers of sedimentary rock that are approximately 40 million years old.

The scarce vegetation is made up of stunted forest, which is very thick and difficult to penetrate. It grows almost two meters high on very rock soils with very little organic material. The forest, which completely loses its leaves during the dry season, consists mainly of pairá and some medium-sized trees, such as frIGINIPANI and lancewood.

Bolaños is especially important for the conservation of seabirds. It protects one of the few known nesting sites in the country for colonies of brown pelican and also it's the only nesting site discovered to date for the magnificent frigatebird.
There is a white, sandy beach at the eastern tip of the island with mounds of seashells and clams. At low tide it's possible to walk round the island and gives visitors a chance to glance at several species of crab that live and mate here, specially the large sized land crab.

31-Guayabo, Negritos & Pajaros Island Biological Reserves

**Size:** 6.8 - 80 and 3.8 hectares respectively.
**Distance from San José:** 118 kilometers.
**Camping:** Not permitted.
**Trails:** On Guayabo Island.
**Dry season:** January to March.

These four islands -negritos are two- are located on the Gulf of Nicoya. The reason for setting them aside as biological reserves was to preserve the large population of sea birds, together with the local flora and fauna.
Guayabo is an imposing mound that towers 50 meters high. Its mostly composed of sedimentary rock between 60-80 million years old. The vegetation that covers the island consists of shrubs, small plants and thorn bushes. The wildlife, except for small insects and crustaceans like crabs, is exclusively made up of birds, including the brown pelican, frigate birds, laughing gulls and boobies.

Pajaros Island is almost completely round and dome-shaped. It's composed of the same kind of sandstone and luttie as Guayabo Island. The vegetation consists of a low-growing forest and patches of second-growth grass. The predominant species are guava, crown fig and stinking toe. Resident animals include rock oysters, crustaceans like barnacles, and birds outcasted from other groups.

Negritos Islands are composed of basalts that belong to the Nicoya Complex. They are covered with semi-deciduous forest in which predominant species are frangipani, spiny cedar and gumbo-limbo. Monkey's ladder, a medical creeper is found in abundance here. Some of the animals that live in this island are the raccoon, parrots, doves, hermit crabs (which are very numerous), brown pelicans and oysters. There some populations of dolphin tuna and mackerel around the island as well.
32-Curu National Wildlife Reserve

Size: 84 hectares.
Distance from San José: 151 kilometers.
Trails: Yes.
Dry season: January through March.

Curu Refuge is located in the lovely region of Nicoya Guanacaste. Despite its small size, it houses a great variety of both terrestrial and marine biodiversity.

The existing habitats include semi-deciduous forest with a mixture of evergreen and semi-deciduous species, low growing forest near the beach, mangrove swamps and littoral woodland. Some of the largest trees in these forest are the silk cotton, the Panama and the redwood.

Mammals that can be seen in both the refuge and the neighboring forests include the white-tailed deer, raccoons, pacas, opossums, monkeys, coyotes and coaties. There’s also a lot of species of lizards, the most common is the ctenosaur, the green iguana and boa constrictor. Birds can also be found here in abundance, such species like the laughing falcon, broad-winged hawk and the cattle egret are a common sight.
Aquatic life include nocturnal hermit crabs, which are very numerous on the beach and on land. There is an almost extinct species of oyster (Ocypode occidentalis) can be found here, as well as lobsters, chitons and mouthless crabs.

**33-Juan Castro Blanco National Park**

**Size:** 14,258 hectares.  
**Location:** Northwestern end of Costa Rica’s Central Valley.  
**Trails:** Limited.

This national park stands at the northwestern end of the Central Valley, becoming part of the Central Volcanic Range Conservation Area together with other nearby protected areas.

Juan Castro Blanco National Park was set up to protect a strip of primary and secondary woodland, located between 700 and 2,267 meters above the sea level. Three life zones contain the abundant plant life, premontane rain forest, very wet premontane forest and low montane rain forest.
This national park offers 44 species of amphibians, 15% of the national total of reptiles, 107 species of birds and 30 mammals, 64 of these species are classified as threatened or endangered in Costa Rica.

Some of the most common animals are the harlequin and grass frogs, basiliks, quetzal, bat falcon, cuckoos, tapirs and coyotes.

Some archeological finds in the area revealed that the region was a meeting place for cultures from the north and the south continent.

34-Isla del Coco National Park

Size: 73.100 hectares.
Distance from San José: 650 kilometers.
Camping: Not permitted.
Trails: Yes.
Dry season: January through March.
Cocos Island called Costa Rica's Galapagos, is a verdant bouquet in the middle of the sea, discovered by Spanish pilot Joan Cabezas in 1526. Thanks to its palm trees and plentiful drinking water, this oceanic island became very well known. During the 17th and 18th centuries, it served as an excellent hide-away for the pirates who flourished along the Pacific coast of Spanish America.

The island is located approximately 500km off the Pacific coast of Costa Rica. It is famous for three buried treasures hidden by William Davis, Benito Bonito and William Thompson between 1684 and 1821.

Besides fabled riches, it is the unique flora and fauna of the island that have attracted numerous international scientists and naturalists. This island is considered a natural laboratory, to date 85 species of birds have been identified, of which three are endemic to the island. There are also two species of reptiles autochthonous to this area, and over 20% of the insects are also endemic.
The predominant vegetation includes cupey, huriki (large endemic tree), spermatophytes, ferns and mosses.

Birds such as the cuckoo and the Cocos Island flycatcher live amongst goats, pigs, and deers.

The jagged coast is lined with cliffs that tower up to 183 meters high and are riddled with underwater caves. This amazingly transparent waters teem with marine life.

Sharks abound everywhere, especially gigantic hammerheads, but there are also white-tipped sharks, and even some whale-sharks have been spotted in this area. Other fish that live in this waters are jacks, tuna, parrot fish and manta.

In December 1967, the island was declared by the UNESCO as a Natural Heritage Site of Humanity; in May 1998, it was declared as a International Importance Wetland by RAMSAR, and in December 2002, Cultural Historic Site by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport (MCJD) of Costa Rica.