

## Guide to Visiting Monteverde

The revered birthplace of ecotourism and a natural treasure that's stayed true to its conservationist essence, Costa Rica's Monteverde Cloud Forests remains as ethereal and magical as they've always been. Tucked away in the heart of the province of Puntarenas, right between the bustling Pacific coast and the bubbling peak of Arenal, Monteverde is like an oasis of calm and tranquillity. Over 35,000 acres of pristine tropical wilderness, home to almost 2,000 distinct species of fauna and untold flora, this unique corner of Costa Rica offers immersive experiences that can be as active or laid-back as you'd love them to be.

### What makes Monteverde so special?

Initially settled by just half-a-dozen Quaker families in the 1950s, Monteverde was set to be preserved and protected right from the get-go. Declared a national reserve in 1972 but privately-managed, Monteverde has seen very limited development which is huge part of its undeniable pull. Only two small towns can be found here, around which lie a smattering of exceptional eco-lodges. A respected biosphere, Monteverde is also home to some of Costa Rica's best organic farms so alongside stunning hiking, wildlife-spotting and whitewater rafting, you can also feast on some of the best coffee, chocolate and cheese the country produces.

A destination that's primarily aimed at adventure travellers looking for a corner of unspoilt natural beauty, Monteverde offers something for everyone, be it adventurous backpackers and families or discerning pensioners looking for a luxurious splurge.

### How to Get There

Monteverde is easy to reach from the capital, San Jose, on a stunning road-trip that takes about three hours. The first half of the journey, especially out of the big smoke, is pretty nondescript yet as the road starts to climb, you'll be privy to breathtaking scenery. Driving up here really is a very rewarding part of a visit. The average altitude in Monteverde is 4,600 feet so you can expect the temperature to be cooler, especially in the evenings. This is a glorious place in which to spend a few days during the scorching summer and about the most popular weekend getaway for San Jose's city-dwelling inhabitants.

If you plan to fly into the northern Liberia International Airport, you can expect the road trip to take a little longer, usually about 3.5hrs. The roads are in good condition so bar a bit of traffic out of the airport, you'll find the journey to be smooth sailing. Given its central location in Puntarenas, Monteverde is easy to visit no matter where in Costa Rica you wish to spend most of your time. The lush rainforests that separate Monteverde from Arenal form a natural boundary north of San Jose. You can easily travel east to visit Arenal first, head north, and return back on the western side of the forest to visit Monteverde, or vice versa – just fight the urge to transfer between the two hubs in a single day as the drive can be exhaustingly long.

### What you should know about visiting Monteverde

WHAT YOU SHOULD PACK: Adding Monteverde to your Costa Rica itinerary means you'll need to pack a few pieces of clothing that are suitable for the unique climate. For hikes, we recommend long pants, long-sleeve tops, good hiking boots and rain jackets. You should expect showers at any time of year although, traditionally, the most rain falls between May and November. Having said that, it's

worth noting that Monteverde is the wettest and coldest part of the country, so do pack accordingly, no matter when you go.

WHEN YOU SHOULD HIKE: Plan to set off on your hikes straight after breakfast. If any rainfall is due, it'll likely come in the early afternoon.

VISIT LOCAL FARMS & EAT LOCAL FOOD: The small but committed communities in Monteverde have reached and continue to maintain a Utopian balance between environmental protection and commercial success, the former not being possible if the latter doesn't also succeed. To help local communities in their enviable and on-going balance-act, it's important to share the love (ie. the tourist spending). Include a farm visit (which we promise you'll love) and check out local restaurants, all of which showcase the **exquisite organic produce** grown in these fertile lands. You'll be doing Monteverde, and yourself, a very rewarding service.

PERFECT FOR FAMILIES Monteverde is like a magical kingdom for nature-loving children, the sheer array of unique attractions, like the butterfly and orchid gardens, serpentarium, bat cave and night-time animal-spotting hikes, delighting kids (and adults) of all ages. There's a vast array of easy walking trails you can take with the kids, so don't discount this place as an adults' only retreat. Quite the opposite, this is one of our most popular destinations for family adventure vacations.

CHECK OUT BOTH TOWNS: **Monteverde** boasts its namesake town but, along the same narrow channel of infrastructure between two equally breathtaking rainforests, you'll also find the gorgeous hub of **Santa Elena**, a charming town that's easy to explore on foot and bursting with great cafés, restaurants and shops.

MORE THAN JUST ONE FOREST: The Monteverde Cloud Forests may be the main drawcard of this region yet right next door, you'll find the **Eternal Children's Forest** (deserves a look-see for the name alone!) and the **Santa Elena Reserve**. Combined, these three nature reserves offer a comprehensive array of hiking options and even more thrilling adventures. When planning a visit to Monteverde, do plan on spending at least four days here so you can soak up the best highlights of all three parks.

GUIDED WALKS ARE BEST: Spotting elusive wildlife is difficult enough when you explore flat landscapes, let alone when you're walking amidst a dense forest, and this is when a professional naturalist guide really comes in handy. Not only to help you spot the animals but also to provide some background info so you can understand more about the places you visit and what they represent.

## Wildlife

Aside from the dedicated gardens aforementioned, Monteverde is also home to two worthy wildlife reserves you ought to visit.

CURI CANCHA WILDLIFE RESERVE: A National Geographic travel book published in 2013 named Monteverde as the best place in the whole world to spot Resplendent Quetzals and it's said the nod is what cemented this amazing reserve onto the world map. Costa Rica actually boasts several places where the majestic bird can be spotted, yet Monteverde is still coveted by bird-lovers as it's home to over 400 distinct species. Dedicated bird-watching tours are best taken during the driest months and, preferably, started at dawn. Head to **Curi-Cancha Wildlife Reserve** if you're short on time, it's really the one place that delivers on the birdy-goods.

MONTEVERDE WILDLIFE REFUGE: A haven for protected species, this refuge offers fantastic guided night-walks that are among the best in the country. Also ideal for bird-watchers, this 55-acre wildlife

corridor protects manakins, toucans, agoutis, monkeys, sloths, wild cats and an insane number of reptiles and insects.

NIGHT-TIME WALKS: Some animals, like the mostly-nocturnal sloths, are best seen on night-time walks so schedule an evening of guided wildlife-spotting whilst here and you'll likely see more (and different) species.

## Activity Options

When looking at Monteverde on a map, it certainly looks impressively large but do note that, for protection's sake, only about 3% of the reserve is accessible to visitors. Don't worry, this translates to over eight miles of hiking trails alone so there'll be plenty to occupy you for an entire day inside this specific reserve alone. Plus, given the sheer number of attractions and adventure activities nearby, it means your 3-day trip to Monteverde can easily be stretched to cover an entire week.

And there will still be plenty left to help you plan a second, third and even tenth visit!

HIKING: You can follow hiking trails in all three neighbouring reserves, the most popular being that in Monteverde Cloud Forest itself, which includes the famed **hanging bridges** as well as **waterfalls** and sensational views the whole way. You don't necessarily need a local guide to walk the trails in any of the parks but it does help to have a trained eye spot even the tiniest creatures which can sometimes be the most fascinating. This is particularly true for families whose children get very excited about any animal spotted and love learning more about the ecosystems they are visiting by asking questions to knowledgeable guides. You can pick up a trail map when you purchase your entry ticket.

ZIPLINING: Monteverde is home to the **longest zip-line in all of Latin America** and is said to be the birthplace of Costa Rica's most famous activity, making this absolutely unmissable for thrill-seekers. Six zipline operators run adrenalin-pumping courses here, all of different lengths and duration. **Skytrek** and **Selvatura** are the most established and popular choices, not only in Monteverde but in all of Costa Rica. Given the fact that this area is home to the most pristine cloud forests, the zipline courses here are also rated the best in the country.

FARM VISITS: A behind-the-scenes look into the farming and processing of coffee is about as good as Monteverde can get. The **Don Juan Coffee Farm** offers well-respected sustainable tours, which also now include presentations on the processing of sugarcane and chocolate. You should definitely schedule a visit to the **Monteverde Cheese Factory**, one of the most iconic places of all. Cheese-making was started in the reserve by the initial families that settled here from the US and nowadays, it's the second-biggest employer and earner in Monteverde after the tourism sector. Arrive famished and you can feast on amazing cheese, milkshakes and ice-cream.

DEDICATED ATTRACTIONS: The **Monteverde Orchid Garden** isn't just a visual spectacle, it's a bonafide ode to the country's national flower. More than 400 species of orchids are naturally grown in these spectacular gardens, about a third of all the country's varieties. If you (or the kids) are into spiders and snakes then the **Monteverde Serpentarium** will probably tickle your fancy, as may the **Bat Jungle** (a tremendously educational place that'll make you fall in love with the cute little guys) **Frog Pond** (Costa Rica boasts some of the most amazing frogs in the world) and **Butterfly Gardens**, a four-part garden that showcases some of the most delicate and colourful butterflies in the world. The wonderful aspect of a visit to these dedicated attractions is that entry is inexpensive and a tour doesn't last longer than an hour or so, so it's easy to 'pop in' between more active excursions.

HORSEBACK RIDING: There's something truly magical about exploring these superlative forests atop a horse-saddle. Several well-established agencies run stunning horseback excursions, many taken on

## Experience Monteverde with Costa Rica Rios

At **Costa Rica Rios**, we love to help people make the most of their visit to Monteverde. Considering the convenient location of these sublime forests, it's also possible (and desirable) to use this as a base to explore nearby regions. We run our rafting trips from the glorious Tenorio River, for example, which is just a short drive north of the cloud forests.

Wherever you want to go, see, taste and experience, we can plan a Monteverde itinerary that'll knock your socks off.

Here are some of the most popular tour ideas we have on offer:

### Rafting Tenorio River – Class III/IV

You'll be picked up from your hotel and driven across the rustic Costa Rican back roads, through gorgeous mountains and quaint villages until you reach Tenorio. Hop in a raft and be prepared for a few hours of non-stop excitement! You'll experience over 20 thrilling rapids, and finish the tour off with a chance to paddle over the breathtaking Cascabel waterfall – a 10 foot drop!

- Adventure Rating: Extreme
- Duration: 4 hours
- Includes: Transfers, professional bilingual guides & lunch
- Age: 13+
- Suitable For: Active, Adventure, Adrenaline, Scenery

### Night Hike

A hike through a tropical forest at night could easily be terrifying, but when you're with a professional guide, it's an unforgettable experience. Sloths, armadillos, porcupines & possums, insects of all sorts, spiders, birds amphibians and reptiles – they all come out at night to hunt, and as you quietly creep through the undergrowth, chances are you'll see an animal you've never seen before.

- Adventure Rating: Easy
- Duration: 2 hours
- Includes: Transfers & professional bilingual guides
- Age: All ages welcome
- Suitable For: Nature, Wildlife

### Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve

Home to 4% of all known plant and animal species, yet only taking up 0.04% of the Earth's surface, Costa Rica is one of the most biologically diverse countries on the planet. Even by Costa Rican standards though, Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve has a particularly rich biodiversity. All that penetrates the forest are a selection of well-maintained trails where you're likely to come across monkeys, the odd sloth and perhaps even a jaguar, along with 2,500 plant species, and tens of thousands of species of insect. Enjoy...

- Adventure Rating: Easy
- Duration: 2.5 hours
- Includes: Transfers & professional bilingual guides
- Age: All ages welcome
- Suitable For: Nature, Wildlife

### Coffee & Chocolate Tour

Located in one of Costa Rica's 8 best coffee growing zones, Monteverde is a great place to find out all about your morning cup of Joe! Learn all about the growing process, harvesting and finally making of the coffee in this informative hike. Later, learn all about the process of chocolate making. Best of all, finish with a coffee and chocolate tasting session!

- Adventure Rating: Easy
- Duration: 2.5 hours
- Includes: Transfers & professional bilingual guides
- Age: All ages welcome
- Suitable For: Nature, Wildlife

### Hanging Bridges Cloud Forest Hike

An expert naturalist guide will take you through the private nature reserve and introduce you to its rich biodiversity. During the walk you will learn more about the fauna and flora of the area as your guide will share his knowledge with you and show you all kinds of species from tiny insects and frogs to snakes, birds and if you're lucky, the peculiar Ocelot. You will walk across 6 hanging bridges and hike around 1.5 miles.

- Adventure Rating: Easy
- Duration: 2.5 hours
- Includes: Transfers & professional bilingual guides
- Age: All ages welcome
- Suitable For: Nature, Wildlife

## Best places to eat & drink around Monteverde

INTRO 160 WORDS

There's very good food to be had in Monteverde, both in the many ecolodges that dot the landscapes and the small towns that make up its base. Here are our favourite places to refuel and recharge:

**Tramonti Restaurant & Pizzeria** – Set in the cloud forest of Monteverde, this is one of the area's most popular establishments with a fabulous wine list to accompany your meal. Enjoy fresh seafood, antipasti, pasta and wood-fired pizzas in this top-notch Italian restaurant

**Stella's Bakery** – A long-established haven of home-cooked meals, with made-to-order sandwiches, soups and other homemade delights. Open for breakfast and lunch

**Restaurante Sofia** – For a spot of fusion fine-dining, Sofia's can't be beaten, its elegant atmosphere created by the arched windows and beautiful views of the mystical forests offering a multi-sensory feast. Try the tenderloin steak in chipotle butter!

**Flor de Vida** – The vegetarian’s top choice, this place really lives up to its name with healthy food that attracts many of the locals. A fusion of local and international cuisines will see offerings such as veggie burgers, pumpkin-almond soup and platefuls of fresh fruit

**Restaurante Morpho’s** – Open for lunch and dinner, this is a popular restaurant specializing in local casados. Steaks and chicken soups and sandwiches are other tasty options. There’s live music on a Monday and plenty of international comfort food (like burgers, potato wedges and curries) to satisfy every taste bud.

**Tree House** – Be prepared for a surprise as this restaurant has a large fig tree growing up through the centre of it! The menu is Mexican influenced, but pizza and pasta dishes are also available

**Celajes** – This clean-food emporium offers a wonderful range of meals to suit large groups and particularly distinctive meals that would suit vegans to perfection. This is the in-house restaurant of one of our favourite Monteverde hotels, Belmar!

**The Green Restaurant** – You’ll find this little joint inside Plaza Monteverde and, on the menu, you’ll find a wide array of meals to suit varying tastes. The produce used is organic and locally sourced (always a great plus), the meals are super tasty and reasonably priced, and the service is friendly and prompt. This is an excellent option for a spot of lunch on a busy day out. Also open for dinner.

## Where to stay when visiting Monteverde

Following are a few of our favourite lodges in Monteverde:

**Cala Lodge** – Cala Lodge is an affordable, family-friendly hotel ideally situated adjacent to the Children’s Eternal Forest. Not a luxury hotel, Cala is a cheerful, simple, homey, and serene lodge, offering a private trail, a garden with a resting and reading area, and Wi-Fi.

**El Establo** – El Establo is a large luxury resort hotel situated in a misty cloud forest on a private 150-acre farm. Family-owned, with 155 guest rooms, a conference center, outstanding recreational facilities and more, El Establo has something for everyone. Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic, other than its sheer size, is its plethora of onsite recreational and wellness facilities. Hotel guests enjoy access to an outdoor tennis court, soccer and basketball courts, two indoor pools, a billiards table, hiking and biking trails, and a fitness center. The resort also offers a full-service spa and hair salon.

**Monteverde Lodge** – Monteverde Lodge is a gorgeous hotel that rests 4,600 feet above sea level on a mountain ridge in the mystical primary cloud forest reserve. Known for its comfortable and elegant rooms, and rustic-chic atmosphere, Monteverde Lodge is an excellent choice for nature lovers seeking privacy and comfort. The lodge restaurant, El Jardin, is exceptional and offers traditional Costa Rican fare as well as international cuisines. Among the Lodge amenities are an outdoor pool, stunning gardens, an outdoor terrace and sun deck, a lobby fireplace and Wi-Fi.

**Poco a Poco** – Poco a Poco is a recently-renovated, family-friendly hotel featuring a spa, fusion-cuisine restaurant/bar with live music, indoor and outdoor pools, Jacuzzi, and a swim up bar. The Poco a Poco spa has two treatment rooms and offers couples massages along with wellness and beauty treatments. The spa also offers a sauna and hydrotherapy. The hotel provides a Kids Club and children’s pool adjoining the adult pool. Additional hotel amenities include fitness center, DVD library, and Wi-Fi in public areas.

**Hotel Belmar** – Hotel Belmar is a sumptuous and romantic resort hotel nestled in a cloud forest with elegant rooms, spectacular views, and first-class amenities. The resort boasts a hot tub, garden, and terrace, as well as a wellness center with yoga and spa services, a fabulous restaurant with an on-site brewery, a juice bar and a lounge bar.

A spectacular destination of its own merit as well as fabulous base for explorations of Costa Rica's north-western region, Monteverde should be right at the top of your must-visit list! **Contact us** and ask about the multi-spot, multi-day adventures we can plan in this magical part of our country.