



**NORTHWEST HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY PRESENTS**

**COSTA RICA:  
Gardens, Conservation,  
and Forest Reserves**

**DEC 29, 2026 - JAN 6, 2027**

# TOUR AT A GLANCE

9 DAYS / 8 NIGHTS

TUE, DEC 29, 2026 - WED, JAN 6, 2027

Land Cost \$4,845 per person

(Does not include airfare to and from San José, Costa Rica)

Single room supplement \$1185

2 nights Hotel Buena Vista Chic, **Alajuela**

2 nights Selva Verde Lodge, **Sarapiquí**

2 nights Arenal Observatory Lodge, **Arenal**

2 nights Xandari Resort, **Alajuela**

## About this trip

Discover the incredible biodiversity and ecological innovation of Costa Rica while learning about agroecology, conservation, and sustainable food systems on this 9-day program with Northwest Horticultural Society. You'll explore everything from chocolate and fruit production to forest ecology as you visit a variety of private reserves and gardens, engage with experts, and experience the country's natural richness through guided hikes and farm-to-table meals. Plus, ring in the new year in the tropics with a "tico-style" celebration!

## Highlights

- Visit The Green Ark Botanical Garden, whose thematic gardens include over 1,600 species of tropical plants and fruit trees, and then enjoy a five-course, farm-to-table tasting menu.
- Take guided hikes in the private, 500-acre rainforest reserve at Selva Verde Lodge, which provides habitat to countless species of plants and animals, including the endangered great green macaw, *Ara ambiguus*.
- Sample gourmet chocolate while learning about the history and cultural importance of cacao in the tropics.
- Visit a working farm to learn about the traditional food products that make up the diet of the local community, including pineapple, papaya, bananas, and coffee.
- Traverse a series of hanging bridges near Arenal Volcano in order to inspect the vegetation that lives higher up.
- Meet an expert on Costa Rica's native orchids and tour his small, family-run garden, where nearly a hundred orchid varieties are on display.

## Meet Your Host



## Daniel Sparler

An inveterate traveler and horticultural enthusiast, Daniel taught Spanish and Latin American Studies for 30 years before retiring in order to indulge his passion for gardening full time. In addition to exploring hundreds of botanical gardens in 45 countries on six continents, Daniel organized and led more than a dozen student tours of Spain, Cuba, El Salvador, China and Austria. His first solo international adventure came at age 17 in the form of an arduous series of public bus rides from Arkansas to Costa Rica and back. Now in his second six-year stint on the board of the Northwest Horticultural Society, Daniel creates the monthly Horticulturally Yours: Plunging into Plantlife column for NHS (click [here](#) for the archive). He has taught botanical Latin classes for NHS and other horticultural groups since 2006 and presented lectures and webinars for NHS, Bellevue Botanical Garden and the NW Flower & Garden Festival. When he's not up to his knees in compost, Daniel enjoys reading Spanish literature and cooking plant-based taste treats.



## ITINERARY AT A GLANCE — DAY BY DAY

**Dec 29 - Dec 30**

2 nights - Hotel Buena Vista Chic  
**Alajuela**

**Day 1 - Tue, Dec 29 (D)**  
ARRIVAL

**Day 2 - Wed, Dec 30 (B, L, D)**  
THE GREEN ARK BOTANICAL GARDEN,  
ARK RESTAURANT

**Dec 31 - Jan 1**

2 nights - Selva Verde Lodge  
**Sarapiquí**

**Day 3 - Thu, Dec 31 (B, L, D)**  
NECTANDRA CLOUD FOREST GARDEN,  
SELVA VERDE LODGE & RAINFOREST  
RESERVE GUIDED HIKE,  
NEW YEAR'S EVE DINNER

**Day 4 - Fri, Jan 1 (B, L, D)**  
OPTIONAL BIRD WALK,  
SELVA VERDE'S PRIVATE RESERVE  
GUIDED HIKE,  
CHOCOLATE FARM TOUR

**Jan 2 - Jan 3**

2 nights - Arenal Observatory Lodge  
**Arenal**

**Day 5 - Sat, Jan 2 (B, L, D)**  
TOWN OF LA FORTUNA,  
FINCA ECOORGÁNICA SARAPIQUÍ

**Day 6 - Sun, Jan 3 (B, L)**  
MÍSTICO ARENAL HANGING BRIDGES,  
ECO TERMALES HOT SPRINGS

**Jan 4 - Jan 5**

2 nights - Xandari Resort  
**Alajuela**

**Day 7 - Mon, Jan 4 (B)**  
XANDARI RESORT

**Day 8 - Tue, Jan 5 (B, L, D)**  
LA CATALINA BOTANICAL GARDEN,  
XANDARI RESORT

**Jan 6**

**Day 9 - Wed, Jan 6 (B)**  
DEPARTURE

*(B, L, D) - Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



*The Green Ark Botanical Garden*

## DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1 – Tue, Dec 29

### Alajuela

#### ARRIVAL

Upon arrival at Juan Santamaría International Airport (SJO), after clearing customs and collecting your luggage, you will be met and transferred to Hotel Buena Vista Chic in Alajuela. This evening, gather at the hotel restaurant for an orientation and welcome dinner.

**Sleep: Hotel Buena Vista Chic, Alajuela**  
**Included meals: (D)**

Day 2 – Wed, Dec 30

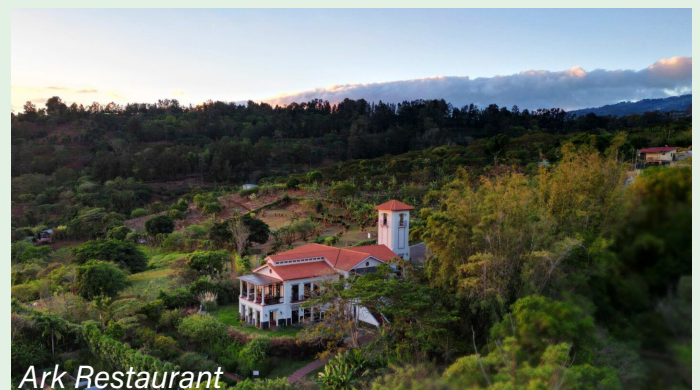
### Alajuela

#### THE GREEN ARK BOTANICAL GARDEN ARK RESTAURANT

This morning depart for The Green Ark Botanical Garden. Their mission statement is the following: "Our mission is to educate and share knowledge about the use of plants for a better personal life and for the well-being of the planet." You will be given a guided tour by one of the specialist guides at the Ark, which will include thematic ethno-botanical garden terraces, including the Medicinal Garden, a Culinary Garden, a Tropical Food Garden (Milpa),

an Essential Oils Garden, and a Natural Colorants Garden. Throughout the garden you'll be surrounded by over 1600 species of ornamental tropical species as well as fruit trees, claimed to be one of the most extensive collections of flora species in Central America. Have lunch at the Ark restaurant and experience their farm to table five course "tasting menu" featuring ingredients that were harvested the morning of your visit. After lunch, you'll have free time to explore on your own before returning to your hotel.

**Sleep: Hotel Buena Vista Chic, Alajuela**  
**Included meals: (B, L, D)**



*Ark Restaurant*





Photo Credit: Karl Gercens

*Cloud Forest Valley Overlook*

Day 3 – Thu, Dec 31

## Sarapiquí

NECTANDRA CLOUD FOREST GARDEN,  
SELVA VERDE LODGE & RAINFOREST  
RESERVE GUIDED HIKE,  
NEW YEAR'S EVE DINNER

Following breakfast and check-out, the journey to Sarapiquí Valley begins. En route, visit the beautiful Nectandra Cloud Forest Garden. Enjoy a walk on their network of trails with your guide, followed by a light lunch at one of their two cafés. After your time in the gardens and forests, continue on to your destination, Selva Verde Lodge & Rainforest Reserve. The property protects more than 500 acres of primary and secondary tropical rainforest. After check-in at the lodge, you'll be given a short orientation to the property and then have time to explore on your own. This evening, celebrate New Year's Eve *tico*-style with an al fresco dinner at La Terrazza, Selva Verde's Italian restaurant overlooking the Sarapiquí River.

**Sleep: Selva Verde Lodge, Sarapiquí**

**Included meal: (B, L, D)**



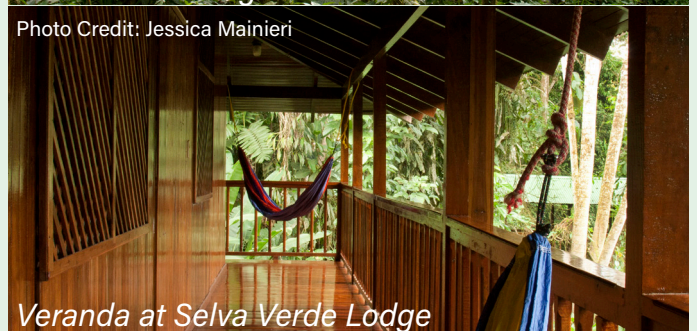
Photo Credit: Daniel Sparler

*Cloud Forest Floor*



*Selva Verde Lodge*

Photo Credit: Jessica Mainieri



*Veranda at Selva Verde Lodge*



Photo Credit: Daniel Sparler

*Cloud Forest Gardens*



*Hiking Trail at Selva Verde Lodge and Rainforest Reserve*

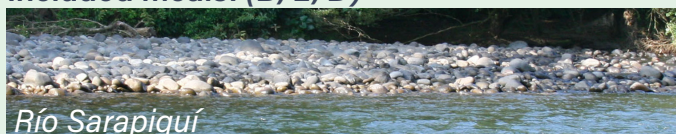
Day 4 – Fri, Jan 1

## Sarapiquí

OPTIONAL BIRD WALK,  
SELVA VERDE'S PRIVATE RESERVE  
GUIDED HIKE,  
CHOCOLATE FARM TOUR

Start the first day of the new year early with an optional guided bird walk. After breakfast, cross the suspension bridge above Río Sarapiquí and enter Selva Verde's private reserve for a guided hike through the virgin rainforest. Learn about the conservation efforts that were made in the 1980s to conserve the 300 acre virgin rainforest reserve from being clear cut. This afternoon, visit a nearby family farm for a special chocolate tour. Learn about the cacao tree, *Theobroma cacao*, and its historical importance, and see firsthand the step-by-step process of transforming cacao beans into the delicious finished product. Return to the lodge for self-exploration/relaxation. Dinner can be taken at your leisure between 6-8 pm. After dinner, join your guide for an optional walk through the property to look for nocturnal wildlife.

**Sleep:** Selva Verde Lodge, Sarapiquí  
**Included meals:** (B, L, D)



*Río Sarapiquí*



*Observing wildlife from the bridge at Selva Verde*

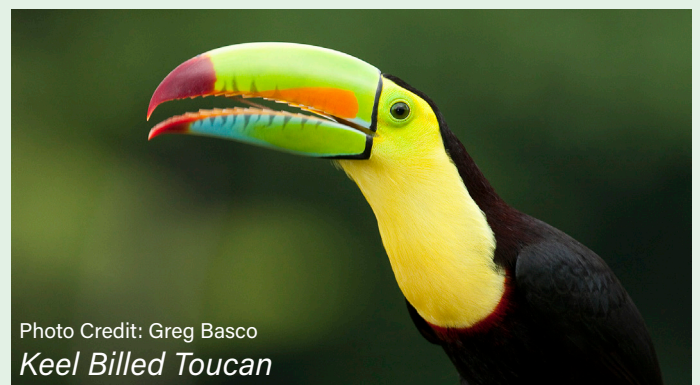


Photo Credit: Greg Basco  
*Keel Billed Toucan*



*Costa Rica Best Chocolate Farm*



*Capuchin Monkey* Photo Credit: Greg Basco



*Common Basilisk*  
Photo Credit: Laura Hare



Photo Credit: Dain Van Schoyck  
*Arenal Hanging Bridges*

Day 5 – Sat, Jan 2

## Arenal

### TOWN OF LA FORTUNA, FINCA ECOORGÁNICA SARAPIQUÍ

After breakfast, check out and travel to the town of La Fortuna, near the entrance of Arenal Volcano National Park. En route, visit Finca Ecoorgánica Sarapiquí and learn about the history of the traditional food products that make up the diet of the local community, including pineapple, papaya, bananas, and coffee. Enjoy a light lunch of fruits and snacks before continuing to Arenal Observatory Lodge, located on a jungle filled property with excellent views of Arenal Volcano. Free time is available this afternoon to explore the trails or relax at the pool. Following dinner this evening, your guide will provide an informal discussion about the flora and fauna in this volcanic ecosystem.

**Sleep: Arenal Observatory Lodge, Arenal**

**Included meals: (B, L, D)**



Photo Credit: Daniel Sparler

*Cloud Forest Coffee Under Bananas*



*Eco Termas Hot Springs*

Day 6 – Sun, Jan 3

## Arenal

### MÍSTICO ARENAL HANGING BRIDGES, ECO TERMALES HOT SPRINGS

This morning will be spent at Místico Arenal Hanging Bridges. Trails along the mountainside and over suspension bridges give amazing views of the forest canopy and, on clear days, the volcano. After spending time on the trails, you will be transferred to Eco Termas Hot Springs, a forest laden retreat for relaxation in their thermal hot springs pools. Begin with lunch at their on site restaurant, followed by a few hours of free time. Dressing rooms with lockers are available. Return to your hotel with dinner on your own.

**Sleep: Arenal Observatory Lodge, Arenal**

**Included meals: (B, L)**



*Howler Monkey*

Photo Credit: Debbie Jordan



*Three-toed Sloth*  
Photo Credit: Debbie Jordan



*Great Green Macaw*

Day 7 – Mon, Jan 4

## Alajuela

### XANDARI RESORT

After breakfast, travel south to Alajuela and the beautiful Xandari Resort. You will arrive in time to relax and have lunch on your own at their wonderful farm to table restaurant. The grounds have charming, manicured trails to explore; you may wish to check out the tempting spa treatments offered, with amazing views of the surrounding forest and hillsides. The afternoon and evening is yours to enjoy the property, including trails with five waterfalls to discover.

**Sleep: Xandari Resort, Alajuela**

**Included meals: (B)**



*Xandari Resort*



*Spa at Xandari Resort*

Day 8 – Tue, Jan 5

## Alajuela

### LA CATALINA BOTANICAL GARDEN, XANDARI RESORT

This morning, visit La Catalina Botanical Garden, a small family-run business only 15 minutes from Xandari. Meet Randall Obsney, an expert of indigenous orchids of Costa Rica, who will accompany you as you tour his family's garden and trails. Enjoy beverages and a light snack before returning to Xandari for the afternoon on your own. This evening, meet together for a celebratory Farewell Dinner, enjoy amazing views of twilight on the hillside from the al fresco dining room.

**Sleep: Xandari Resort, Alajuela**

**Included meals: (B, L, D)**



*Monochaetum vulcanicum*

Photo Credit: Jennifer Shea Moses

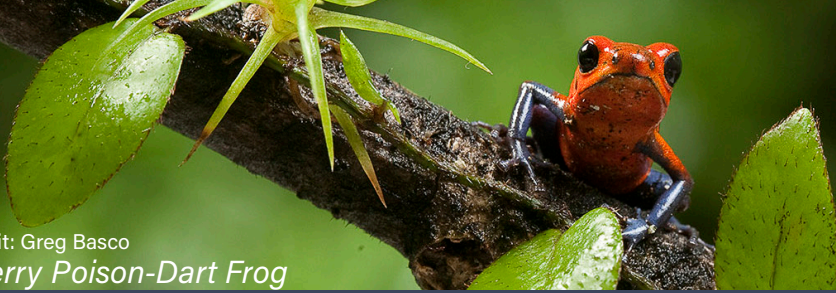
Day 9 – Wed, Jan 6

### DEPARTURE

**Included meals: (B)**

Photo Credit: Greg Basco

*Strawberry Poison-Dart Frog*



*Red-eyed Tree Frog*



## Pricing

**\$4,845** per person

*Does not include airfare to and from destination.  
Cost is based on a minimum of 14 participants  
in double occupancy.*

Single room supplement **\$1185**



Photo Credit: Daniel Sparler  
*Passiflora vitifolia*

### Included

- Activities and meals as mentioned in itinerary.
- Full time guide for the duration of your program.
- Private transportation and driver for the duration of the program.
- Arrival and departure transfers based on individual flight schedules.
- Non alcoholic beverage with meals.
- Water refill station during transfers.
- Carbon Offset.

### Not included

- International airfare.
- Tips.
- Travel Insurance.
- Personal items.

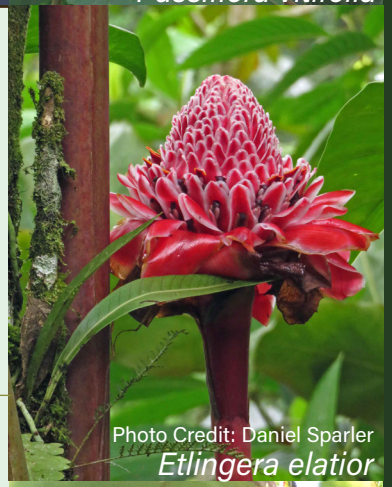


Photo Credit: Daniel Sparler  
*Etlingera elatior*

### Additional Payment Details

A \$500 deposit is required for participants to register and reserve a space on the program.  
Final payment due date: September 25, 2026.  
Reservations made less than 95 days prior to departure require full payment.

Pricing includes a \$250 donation to Northwest Horticultural Society.  
Thank you for your support.

All participants are required to be a member of NHS at the time the tour begins.

### Cancellation and Refund Policy

120 or more days before departure: \$350 cancellation fee; remaining balance is refunded.  
119 - 96 days before departure: full deposit of \$500 is forfeited.  
95 - 0 days before departure: 100% of program price is forfeited.

Holbrook Travel strongly recommends the purchase of travel protection for medical emergencies while traveling and to protect your investment.

Please note that Cancel for Any Reason coverage, or Trip Cancellation coverage that waives pre-existing condition exclusions, may require policy purchase within 10-14 days of your initial deposit, depending on the provider.

See *Holbrook Travel's* registration site for additional travel information and resources.

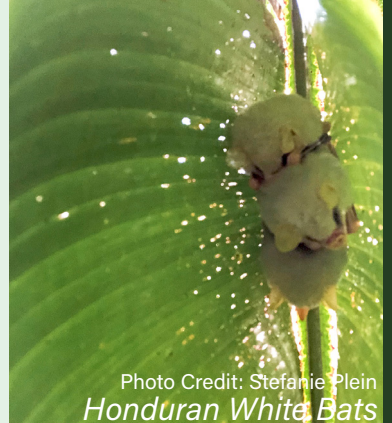


Photo Credit: Stefanie Plein  
*Honduran White Bats*



Photo Credit: Greg Basco  
*Heliconia*



Photo Credit: Stefanie Plein  
*Violet-crowned Woodnymph  
Hummingbird*



*Blue Morpho Butterfly*  
Photo Credit: Stefanie Plein



**NORTHWEST  
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*Join fellow NHS members as we travel and learn from each other and from horticultural experts around the world. The NHS Travel Program supports our mission to provide inspiration and education to our members. Our tours expand knowledge and appreciation of horticulture while fostering camaraderie among participants.*

***Tour Operator: HOLBROOK TRAVEL***



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*Hanging bridge in Costa Rica*

*Photo Credits: Karl Garcens*



*Photo Credit: Carla Moure  
Front Image - Arenal Volcano*