

THE VOLCANOES OF COSTA RICA

Magnificent Marvels of Fire

Costa Rica is part of the Pacific Ring of Fire and is home to some of the world's most mesmerizing volcanoes. In fact, the present-day landmass known as Costa Rica is the result of complex volcanic activity that took place some 75 million years ago, and still continues today.

Counting every location or crater where an eruption has occurred within its borders, Costa Rica boasts a stunning 112 volcanic sites throughout the country. Almost eight of these in particular attract millions of visitors due to their active nature and unsurpassed natural beauty. The enormous craters of these prominent structures – located among Costa Rica's mountain ranges, along with their sulfurous lakes of intense coloring, thermal hot springs and occasional rivers of lava that paint the landscape a reddish tint – are characteristics that make the volcanoes of Irazú, Poás, Barva, Turrialba, Arenal, Rincón de la Vieja, Miravalles and Tenorio unique marvels of fire, all surrounded by fascinating biodiversity. For this reason, most of the volcanoes and their surrounding areas have been designated national parks and are at the epicenter of many stories and legends.

At the foot of Costa Rica's volcanoes, towns, forests and agricultural fields coexist with these colossal formations. These regions also boast an array of tourism activities to be enjoyed, including canopy tours and rappelling, mountain biking and horseback riding and delighting in thermal hot springs. From the capital city, it is possible to spot the contour of some of these giants situated in seemingly peaceful alignment. For a closer view, NatureAir's Volcano Sky Tour invites you to appreciate some of the most astounding fiery marvels on Earth from new heights. Read on as we reveal the most amazing secrets of these mountains of fire.

Rincón de la Vieja Volcano

Situated 1,806 meters above sea level, Rincón de la Vieja is approximately 600,000 years old. It is considered one of the most beautiful areas within the Guanacaste mountain range, not only because of its intriguing volcanic manifestations (which include fumaroles, bubbling sulfurous lagoons, mud springs and its active crater) but also for the abundant diversity of flora and fauna, riverbeds and waterfalls that adorn it. It was declared a national park in 1973 and it sits 25 kilometers northwest of the city of Liberia. Birds such as the Collared Aracari toucan and the Great Curassow, mammals like the Collared Peccary and various monkey species such as the white-faced, spider and howlers are commonly spotted within the park. The park also protects a large amount of orchids, including the Easter orchid (*Cattleya skinneri*), which is Costa Rica's national flower, as well as a sizeable number of Guanacaste trees, which have been declared the national tree of Costa Rica. The volcanic structure encompassing the Rincón de la Vieja terrain is composed of nine volcanic points and measures more than 400 squared kilometers in extension. Its most recent eruptions occurred in 1991, 1995 and 1997.

Arenal Volcano

Sitting 1,680 meters above sea level, Arenal Volcano forms part of the Tilarán Mountain Range and is situated adjacent to the pasturelands of the San Carlos region. Tourists flock to the small town of La Fortuna, conveniently located three hours from San José, to view its lava flows. Arenal is listed among the 10 most active volcanoes in the world, and for good reason: Arenal regularly puts on a spectacle, showing off with strong rumbling sounds and occasional rock avalanches, as well as smoke, ash and lava eruptions that descend its slope at speeds reaching 70 kilometers per hour and temperatures reaching 1,000 degrees Celsius.

Arenal's last great eruption took place in 1968. Until then, it was assumed that the volcano was just another peak of the mountain range. However, on that fateful date, it destroyed two towns and devastated a 12 square kilometer area. The volcano and its surroundings were declared a national park in 1994, and the volcano is now regarded with great awe and respect. It boasts one active crater and another one that remains dormant – for now.

Accompanying this beautiful giant is Lake Arenal, an artificial body of water measuring 87.8 square kilometers that is considered one of the best places in the world to go wind surfing. Fragments of rainforest and vast cattle-grazing land lie beneath Arenal's imposing shadow. On a path left by a lava eruption, today flow the waters of the La Fortuna Waterfall, which measures 38 meters in height. Thermal hot springs are the area's main attraction, most of which boast nearby trails and numerous lookout points.

Miravalles Volcano

Located in the protected zone of Miravalles, situated to the north of the city of Bagaces, Miravalles Volcano stands as the tallest peak of the Guanacaste Mountain Range, reaching an altitude of 2,028 meters above sea level. Its cone developed some 8,200 years ago as a result of numerous and abundant gushes of lava and avalanches, and its only recent eruption dates to 1946.

Despite Miravalles's serene demeanor, powerful energy emanates from within its womb, producing electricity that is used to power the surrounding areas. Various thermal bathing pools and natural trails exist within its vicinity, and its south flank hosts the Miravalles Geotermic Project (MGT), managed by the Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad. The MGT is the only project in Costa Rica that is able to utilize stored energy beneath the Earth's surface, in the form of heat, to produce electricity, generating in the process 15.45% of the energy used in Costa Rica.

Even though this sleeping colossus does not appear to have much volcanic activity in its cone, it does have a very active sector, known as Las Hornillas, situated approximately two kilometers and a half away from the geothermal project. Some of the most interesting volcanic manifestations, such as fumaroles, mud spores and bubbling water pools of up to 200 degrees Celsius, are found in the vicinity.

Tenorio Volcano

Known for the beautiful Río Celeste Waterfall, which owes its name to the brilliant turquoise blue of its waster, the Tenorio Volcano is part of the Guanacaste Mountain Range, sitting between the regions of Guatuso and Upala de Alajuela, Cañas and Tilarán. It is one of the richest parks in terms biodiversity in all of Costa Rica, boasting plants such as heliconias, ferns and trees like the Pilón (*Hieronyma alchorneoides*) and the Jícara Danto (*Parmentiera valerii*). The latter is unique to the region and its fruits serve as sustenance for animals like ocelots, pumas, Collared Peccaries and umbrella birds.

The park also offers a panoramic view of the Guatuso plains, Lake Nicaragua and the entire Tenorio volcanic structure. Its thermal waters and waters of an intense light-blue color are the result of their rich mineral content, which is derived from the volcano. The Maleku indigenous populations that inhabit and protect the primary forest, which is of great biological importance, consider it sacred.

Get a bird's eye view of Costa Rica's volcanoes with NatureAir.

Now you can get closer to the most impressive volcanoes of Costa Rica than you ever thought possible. Starting December 1, NatureAir's Volcano Sky Tour will take you on an hour-long flight to explore, from the air, the beauty of these mountains of fire.

Departing from Liberia, in Guanacaste, the Sky Tour will allow you to lay your sights on the summit of the sizzling Arenal Volcano and admire its vast and beautiful lake. You will also fly over the enormous boiling lagoon belonging to the Rincón de la Vieja Volcano, appreciate the pristine forests on top of the Tenorio and the Orosi volcanoes and enjoy views of the Miravalles Geothermic Project, which feeds on energy provided by the volcano of the same name.

Venture on to discover elusive waterfalls hidden within the heart of the forest and mystical lagoons that rest upon mountaintops inaccessible by land. Up in the sky in just seconds, you will also travel through the Santa Rosa National Park, one of the most important tropical dry forest habitats of the American tropics. Witness how its lands fade into a beautiful blue sea upon which the famed surfing spot Roca Bruja is visible. You'll also catch a view of the hacienda where the historic Casona sits, a symbol of a legendary battle in defense of our nation's freedom. To finish in style, you will pass over the city of Liberia and the captivating Gulf of Papagayo with its calm waters and idyllic beaches.

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