

7 Days in Costa Rica: Arenal & Manuel Antonio

La Fortuna, Costa Rica & Manuel Antonio, Costa Rica · February · 7 days

Tailored for families with children - includes child-friendly activities, interactive experiences, and family-appropriate options

Four days around Arenal in La Fortuna, then three on the Pacific coast in Manuel Antonio. Look forward to the La Fortuna Waterfall, the Tabacón hot springs and a morning in Manuel Antonio National Park.

Open the interactive trip: live map, photos and links

Before you go: [Get a Costa Rica eSIM: data on landing](#)

What this trip might cost, per person for 7 days, flights extra:

Budget \$630-800 · Mid-range \$1,000-1,350 · Comfort \$1,700-1,950

Opening hours, prices and transport change. Please double-check bookings and times before you go.

YOUR TRIP AT A GLANCE

- 1

DAY 1

Arenal Viewpoint, Tabacón and La Fortuna Town

La Fortuna · 4 nights
- 2

DAY 2

Arenal National Park and Tabacón Hot Springs
- 3

DAY 3

La Fortuna Waterfall and Arenal River Safari
- 4

DAY 4

Lake Arenal, Kiwebb Waterfall and Baldi Hot Springs
- 5

DAY 5

Jacó Beach, Carara and Río Claro to Manuel Antonio

Manuel Antonio · 3 nights
- 6

DAY 6

Manuel Antonio National Park and Reptilandia
- 7

DAY 7

Quepos, Isla Caño Snorkel and Playa Espadilla Sur
- ?

AFTER THE LAST DAY

Before you go: La Fortuna, Manuel Antonio

Arenal Viewpoint, Tabacón and La Fortuna Town

Arrival day: an easy start close to your stay

Sunrise 6:00 AM

Golden hour 5:19 PM

Sunset 5:48 PM

Your base for 4 nights: La Fortuna

February is La Fortuna's sweet spot: dry season means clear views of Arenal Volcano, the rainforest is lush, and wildlife is easy to spot. You'll split time between volcano hikes, natural hot springs, and nearby beaches on the Caribbean coast.

GO

11:30 AM · 1 hour (flight) or 5 hours (drive)

San José to La Fortuna

Fly from San José (SJO) to La Fortuna airstrip (FON), roughly 1 hour. Or drive 4.5-5 hours from San José via the highway north; flights are quicker with kids. Rent a car at the airport or in town.

- Rental car (your plan) · 4.5-5.5 hours · Fuel only, roughly \$35-45

- Shared shuttle · 4.5-5 hours · \$50-60 per person

- Private transfer · 4.5 hours · \$180-220 per vehicle

Compare flights

1

2:30 PM · 1.5 hours

Arenal Observatory Lodge Viewpoint

Free

Iconic 360-degree view of Arenal Volcano (active cone) and the surrounding forest. Even on a hazy day, you'll see the volcano's massive silhouette. A 20-minute drive south from La Fortuna town; take the main road toward the park entrance, then follow signs.

Insider tip: Go now, before the afternoon clouds roll in. Park at the main viewpoint area (no entry fee for non-guests). Stand on the far left platform for the clearest cone shot.

Open in Google Maps >

2

4:15 PM · 2 hours

Tabacón Thermal Resort and Spa

\$47 for day pass with hot springs access · Open 8 AM-10 PM

Natural hot springs fed by geothermal activity from Arenal. Three pools at different temperatures (warm, hot, very hot) set in lush gardens. Kids love the range. A 15-minute drive northwest from the viewpoint, back toward La Fortuna, then west.

Insider tip: Arrive before 5 PM to beat the evening rush. Start in the warmest pool and work your way up. Bring swimwear; no towel rental needed if you pack yours.

Book tickets

Open in Google Maps >

3

6:30 PM · 1.5 hours

La Fortuna town walk and dinner at Restaurante Don Rufino

\$38-65 for dinner · Open 11 AM-10 PM

Stroll the main drag (Calle Central and Avenida Fortuna) past shops and small cafes, then sit down for dinner. Don Rufino serves excellent fresh fish, casados (plate meals), and kids' portions. Reliable, friendly, and central.

Insider tip: Walk during golden hour (5:19-5:48 PM) before dinner. Order the grilled mahi-mahi or a family-style casado. Sit outside if the light holds.

Open in Google Maps >

DAY 1: ARENAL VIEWPOINT, TABACÓN AND LA FORTUNA TOWN (CONTINUED)

If you land early (optional, close to your stay, before the plan above)

La Fortuna town square (Parque Central): Central plaza with a church, benches, and local life. A calm 10-minute walk from your hotel if you arrive by mid-morning.

Arenal Mundo Aventura café and viewpoint: Casual hilltop café with a view of Arenal and good strong coffee. 15 minutes by car south from town; pop in for a brew and a quiet perch before lunch.

PREFER A GUIDE? · FULL DAY OR HALF DAY EVENING

Arenal Volcano and rainforest night tour

You'll spot nocturnal wildlife (frogs, spiders, maybe sloths) and soak in the natural hot springs at the base of the volcano, with a guide pointing out what you'd miss alone.

[Book this tour](#)

PREFER A GUIDE? · HALF DAY

Wildlife spotting boat tour on Lake Arenal

From the water you'll see monkeys, caimans, and birds in their natural habitat without the hiking fatigue for younger kids.

[Book this tour](#)

[Open Day 1 as a route in Google Maps](#)

Where to stay in La Fortuna

Stay in central La Fortuna, within walking distance of the main drag (Calle Central). You'll be close to restaurants, the town square, and it's the easiest base for heading to Arenal National Park and hot springs on the next few days.

La Fortuna Lodge

Budget · Hotel · \$

Budget option in town centre, simple rooms, easy access to restaurants and tours.

[Book now](#)

[Google Maps >](#)

La Fortuna Eco Lodge

Budget · Guesthouse · \$

Budget-friendly, run by locals who know best trails. Simple rooms, excellent breakfast included.

[Book now](#)

[Google Maps >](#)

La Fortuna Hostel & Guest House

Budget · Guesthouse · \$

Budget option. Local knowledge from staff, helpful for waterfall access info.

[Book now](#)

[Google Maps >](#)

Arenal Kioro Suites & Spa

Mid-range · Resort · \$\$

Hot spring pools on-site, volcano views from rooms, family suites available.

[Book now](#)

[Google Maps >](#)

Tabacon Thermal Resort & Spa

Mid-range · Resort · \$\$

Natural hot springs, rainforest setting, kids activities, good base for Day 2 hikes.

[Book now](#)

[Google Maps >](#)

Hotel Arenal Springs Resort & Spa

Mid-range · Resort · \$\$

Hot spring pools on grounds, family rooms with volcano views. Kids love the thermal baths after hiking.

[Book now](#)

[Google Maps >](#)

[All stays in La Fortuna](#)

[Holiday rentals](#)

Where to eat

Altamira Restaurant

Costa Rican · Lunch · \$\$

Local spot with volcano views. Order the casado with fresh fish and rice.

[Google Maps >](#)

La Choza de Laurel

Costa Rican · Dinner · \$\$

Family-friendly. Try the arroz con pollo. Kids eat free under 10.

[Google Maps >](#)

DAY 1: ARENAL VIEWPOINT, TABACÓN AND LA FORTUNA TOWN (CONTINUED)

TOURS & DAY TRIPS FROM LA FORTUNA

HALF DAY

La Fortuna Waterfall and natural pool swim

A short hike leads to a 70-meter waterfall you can swim directly under; kids love it and it's the easiest major waterfall in the area.

[Book now](#)

HALF DAY OR FULL DAY

Hot springs and spa package

Soak in geothermal pools heated by the volcano, eat fresh local food, and the kids can play safely in family-friendly pools.

[Book now](#)

2-3 HOURS

Hanging bridges canopy walk

Walk suspended bridges through the treetops to spot sloths and birds at eye level; thrilling for adventurous kids without serious risk.

[Book now](#)

Arenal National Park and Tabacón Hot Springs

Sunrise 6:00 AM Golden hour 5:19 PM Sunset 5:48 PM Sleep in La Fortuna · night 2 of 4

Have breakfast in town, spend the morning on the Los Tucanes and Arenal 1968 trails, then finish with another soak at Tabacón.

- 1

6:45 AM · 2.5 hours

Book ahead

Arenal National Park, Los Tucanes Trail

\$28 · Open 6 AM-4 PM

Start before 7 AM on the Los Tucanes loop trail, a 3 km moderate hike through primary rainforest where howler monkeys call at dawn and toucans hunt in the canopy. Listen more than you look. Five minutes' drive from central La Fortuna, trailhead parking is small so go early.

Insider tip: Wear ear protection or headphones to dampen howler monkey roars; bring binoculars and move slowly. Kids stay closer to guide.

Book tickets

Open in Google Maps >
- 2

9:30 AM · 1 hour

Breakfast spot in La Fortuna town center

\$15-23 · Open 7 AM-10 PM

Refuel at a local sodas or cafe near the town square after your hike. Gallo pinto, fresh juice, and coffee. Ten minutes' drive from the trailhead.

Insider tip: Order casado if you're hungry; it's a plate with rice, beans, salad, plantain, and protein. Eat on the porch and watch the street.

Open in Google Maps >
- 3

12:00 PM · 3 hours

Book ahead

Arenal 1968 Trail

\$28 · Open 6 AM-4 PM

Afternoon guided hike (12 PM start, 3 hours) through mixed rainforest and lava rock forest to a viewpoint of Arenal Volcano and Lake Arenal. Wildlife is less active in midday heat, but the kids will stay interested in the geological story and the view. Book a guide in advance; they know where sloths and howler monkeys hang out. Fifteen minutes' drive from town.

Insider tip: Guides will spot three-toed sloths in trees along the trail; ask them to point out camouflaged animals. Bring a full water bottle; the trail is exposed in parts.

Book tickets

Open in Google Maps >

DAY 2: ARENAL NATIONAL PARK AND TABACÓN HOT SPRINGS (CONTINUED)

4

3:30 PM · 1.5 hours

Tabacón Hot Springs

\$47 for day pass · Open 8 AM-10 PM

After the afternoon hike, soak in the warm natural thermal pools fed by hot springs. The resort allows day visitors to use the pools and grounds (small fee). Kids will love the warm water and the chance to cool off. Ten minutes' drive from the Arenal 1968 trailhead.

Insider tip: The pools warm up in late afternoon. Bring swimwear and a change of clothes. No food stalls, so grab snacks in town first.

[Book tickets](#)

[Open in Google Maps >](#)

5

6:30 PM · 1.5 hours

Dinner at El Novillo Steakhouse

\$38-57 for dinner · Open 11 AM-10 PM

Local favorite for grilled chicken and beef. Family-friendly, good portion sizes, and a quiet dining room away from the tourist strip. Short walk from central La Fortuna.

Insider tip: Order the casado con pollo; it comes with rice, beans, salad, plantain, and grilled chicken breast. The agua de Jamaica is excellent.

[Open in Google Maps >](#)

[Open Day 2 as a route in Google Maps](#)

Where to eat

Choco Cafe

Cafe, Light Bites · Breakfast · \$

Early-opening spot for strong coffee and fresh pastries before your hike. Go by 6:30am.

[Google Maps >](#)

La Choza de Laurel

Costa Rican · Lunch · \$\$

Back in town by 1pm for gallo pinto and fresh juice. Refuel before afternoon wildlife spotting.

[Google Maps >](#)

Altamira Restaurant

International, Local · Dinner · \$\$

Relaxed family vibe. Order the casado, kids eat free Tuesdays. Open till 9pm.

[Google Maps >](#)

La Fortuna Waterfall and Arenal River Safari

Sunrise 6:00 AM

Golden hour 5:19 PM

Sunset 5:48 PM

Sleep in La Fortuna · night 3 of 4

See the waterfall first, then float the river on the safari, eat at Altamira and finish with the Río Celeste trail.

1

8:00 AM · 2 hours

La Fortuna Waterfall

\$28 · Open 7 AM-4 PM

A 70-meter cascade into a cold, swimmable pool ringed by rainforest. The trail down is steep but short (10 minutes each way). Bring a towel and water shoes; the rocks are slippery. Drive 5km south from town, or take a taxi (about 15 minutes, \$12-15).

Insider tip: Arrive before 8:30 AM to avoid tour groups. The water's cold, so kids warm up faster by moving around.

[Book tickets](#)[Open in Google Maps >](#)

2

10:30 AM · 2.5 hours

Book ahead

Arenal River Safari

\$132-170 per person for tour

Float down the Arenal River on a motorized boat watching for sloths, macaws, caimans and riverside birds. The guides are sharp at spotting wildlife. Meet at the dock in La Fortuna town; tours run 10:30 AM-1:00 PM. Operators pick up from hotels.

Insider tip: Book the night before with Desafío or Pure Trek. Sit in the front for the best wildlife views and wildlife photos.

[Book tickets](#)[Open in Google Maps >](#)

3

1:15 PM · 1 hour

Altamira Restaurant

\$23-34 for lunch · Open 11 AM-9 PM

Simple lunch spot with a river view and solid casados (rice, beans, salad, protein). It's near the dock and good for refueling before the afternoon. A 3-minute walk from the boat launch.

Insider tip: Order the fried fish. Tap water is safe; ask for agua con hielo if you want it cold.

[Open in Google Maps >](#)

4

2:45 PM · 3 hours

Río Celeste Trail

\$28 · Open 6 AM-4 PM

A turquoise river and two small waterfalls in a volcanic canyon. The 4km trail is moderate, with creek crossings and forest shade. The water is milky blue from mineral deposits. Drive 30km northeast from La Fortuna (35 minutes) to Tenorio Volcano area.

Insider tip: Kids aged 6+ handle it fine. The water is chilly but you can wade. Park at the ranger station and hire a local guide (about \$30) for wildlife calls.

[Book tickets](#)[Open in Google Maps >](#)

DAY 3: LA FORTUNA WATERFALL AND ARENAL RIVER SAFARI (CONTINUED)

5

5:20 PM · 45 minutes

Golden Hour Drive back to La Fortuna

Free

Drive back via the Arenal Volcano viewpoint on Route 142. Stop for 15 minutes as the sun drops and light hits the cone. No entry fee; pull into the mirador (viewpoint) on the south shore road.

Insider tip: Best light is 5:20-5:45 PM. Keep the engine off and listen for howler monkeys in the trees.

[Open in Google Maps >](#)

[Open Day 3 as a route in Google Maps](#)

Where to eat

Arenal Kicho's

Costa Rican · Breakfast · \$

Casual spot near town. Order gallo pinto and fresh juice before heading out.

[Google Maps >](#)

La Choza de Laurel

Costa Rican · Lunch · \$\$

On the river road. Casado with fresh catch, good for refuelling mid-adventure.

[Google Maps >](#)

Altamira Restaurant

International · Dinner · \$\$

Town centre. Relaxed vibe. Try the fresh fish tacos after a long day.

[Google Maps >](#)

Lake Arenal, Kiwebb Waterfall and Baldi Hot Springs

Sunrise 6:00 AM

Golden hour 5:19 PM

Sunset 5:48 PM

Sleep in La Fortuna · night 4 of 4

Take the Desafío boat tour on the lake, swim in the pools at Kiwebb, then relax at Baldi before dinner at Lava Lounge.

1

6:15 AM · 3 hours

Book ahead

Lake Arenal boat tour with Desafío Adventure Company

\$150-190 per person for tour

Sunrise boat trip across Costa Rica's largest lake. Spot howler monkeys, sloths, and macaws from the water; Arenal Volcano rises behind. Desafío operates from the La Fortuna dock, a 5-minute drive from town centre.

Insider tip: Book the night before. Bring layers; the lake is cool at dawn. Sit on the right side for volcano views.

[Book tickets](#)
[Open in Google Maps >](#)

2

2:45 PM · 2 hours

Arenal Kiwebb Waterfall and natural pools

\$95-132 per person for tour

Short family-friendly hike (30 mins one way) through rainforest to a two-tier waterfall and small pools. Wildlife spotting likely: toucans, trogons, sloths. 15 minutes' drive southeast of La Fortuna.

Insider tip: Wear water shoes; rocks are slippery. Bring bug spray. The upper pool is shallow and perfect for kids.

[Book tickets](#)
[Open in Google Maps >](#)

3

5:15 PM · 1.5 hours

Baldi Hot Springs Resort

\$57 for day pass · Open 8 AM-10 PM

Thermal pools at varying temperatures in tropical gardens, plus restaurants and a spa. Relax as the light fades. 20 minutes' drive south of La Fortuna.

Insider tip: Day pass includes pools. Go at golden hour; fewer crowds, best light for photos. The hottest pool is on the highest level.

[Book tickets](#)
[Open in Google Maps >](#)

4

7:00 PM · 1.5 hours

Dinner at Lava Lounge

\$34-53 for dinner · Open 5 PM-11 PM

Wood-fired pizzas and craft beers in a casual, family-run space. Central La Fortuna. Back in town by 7 PM.

Insider tip: Try the Arenal pizza. Kids' portions available. Book a table if you're more than four.

[Open in Google Maps >](#)
[Open Day 4 as a route in Google Maps](#)

DAY 4: LAKE ARENAL, KIWEBB WATERFALL AND BALDI HOT SPRINGS (CONTINUED)

Where to eat

Choco Café

Café, light breakfast · Breakfast · \$

Local spot with strong coffee and fresh pastries before heading out early.

[Google Maps >](#)

La Choza de Laurel

Costa Rican · Lunch · \$\$

Casual family place near Lake Arenal. Try casado with fresh fish and arroz con beans.

[Google Maps >](#)

Altamira Restaurant

International, Costa Rican · Dinner · \$\$

Views over the lake at sunset. Good for families, solid grilled fish and chicken options.

[Google Maps >](#)

Jacó Beach, Carara and Río Claro to Manuel Antonio

Sunrise 5:57 AM

Golden hour 5:18 PM

Sunset 5:47 PM

Your base for 3 nights: Manuel Antonio

Drive to the coast with stops at Jacó Beach, the Carara bridge walk and the Río Claro pool, then take a sunset walk in Manuel Antonio.

GO

7:00 AM · 5 hours 30 minutes

La Fortuna to Manuel Antonio by car

Drive south through the central highlands toward the Pacific coast. Route: La Fortuna -> San José highway -> Quesada -> Naranjo -> Atenas -> Orotina -> Jacó -> Quepos -> Manuel Antonio (about 5.5 hours, 270 km). Stop for fuel and snacks as needed; the road is paved but hilly with curves. Arrive by late afternoon.

- Rental car (your transport) · 3.5 hours · Fuel ~\$15-20
- Private transfer · 3.5 hours · \$120-150 per vehicle
- Shared shuttle · 4-5 hours · \$55-70 per person

Book a rental car

Book a transfer

1

12:30 PM · 1 hour

Jacó Beach

Free

A quick break at Costa Rica's most popular surfer town to stretch legs and grab lunch. Brown sand, strong waves, and a lively beach strip with casual sodas and seafood spots. About 2 hours into the drive, 10 minutes off the main highway.

Insider tip: Park near the central beach entrance, not the pier. Ceviche is cheap and fresh at any beachfront soda.

[Open in Google Maps >](#)

2

2:00 PM · 45 minutes

Carara National Park viewpoint and bridge walk

Free · Open 8 AM-4 PM

A scenic and wildlife-rich stop just south of Jacó. Walk the short hanging bridge over the Tárcoles River to spot crocodiles, howler monkeys, macaws and scarlet tanagers from above. The bridge is easy for kids and takes 20-30 minutes round trip. About 15 minutes south of Jacó.

Insider tip: Go mid-afternoon for best light on the river and most animal activity. Bring binoculars. Parking is roadside and safe.

[Open in Google Maps >](#)

3

3:30 PM · 1 hour

Río Claro natural pool

Free

A refreshing river swim in clear turquoise water surrounded by rainforest, about 30 minutes before Manuel Antonio. Small entrance fee supports locals. Families love it: safe, shallow in spots, and a great way to cool off after the long drive. Park at the roadside sign, short walk down to the water.

Insider tip: Bring a towel and dry clothes in the car. The water is cold but refreshing. Kids can paddle in the shallows.

Book tickets

[Open in Google Maps >](#)

4

5:00 PM · 1 hour 30 minutes

Manuel Antonio town centre and sunset walk

Free

Arrive in Manuel Antonio by 5:00 PM. Drop luggage at your hotel, then stroll through the main drag (Avenida Central) to orient yourself. Browse local shops, grab a drink at a cafe, and end at the beachfront promenade for golden hour. Sunset is at 5:47 PM, so you'll catch the last light over the Pacific.

Insider tip: Book dinner at a beachfront spot after sunset; most restaurants fill up by 7 PM. Las Olas is reliable and casual for families.

[Open in Google Maps >](#)[Open Day 5 as a route in Google Maps](#)

Where to stay in Manuel Antonio

Book in the central part of Manuel Antonio, within walking distance of the town's main restaurants and shops, and close to the national park entrance. The beachfront hotels get pricey; a mid-range spot one block back gives you easy access to everything without the markup.

Villa Bosque

Budget · Guesthouse · \$

Hillside location above town. Simple, clean rooms. Quieter than main strip, decent breakfast included.

[Book now](#)[Google Maps >](#)

Vela Bar & Restaurant Rooms

Budget · Guesthouse · \$

Budget option right in town center. Simple rooms, easy access to park entrance and restaurants.

[Book now](#)[Google Maps >](#)

Villas Nicolás

Budget · Guesthouse · \$

Budget-friendly, colorful rooms, kitchen access. Walking distance to marina.

[Book now](#)[Google Maps >](#)

Hotel Si Como No

Mid-range · Hotel · \$\$

Manuel Antonio town center. Pool, reliable WiFi, family rooms. Walking distance to restaurants and shops.

[Book now](#)[Google Maps >](#)

Si Como No Resort & Spa

Mid-range · Resort · \$\$

Family-friendly, jungle-facing pools, hot tub. Short walk to park trails and beaches. Good base.

[Book now](#)[Google Maps >](#)

Makanda by the Sea

Luxury · Resort · \$\$\$

Perched above rainforest with ocean view. Pool, restaurant on-site. Worth it if budget stretches slightly.

[Book now](#)[Google Maps >](#)[All stays in Manuel Antonio](#)[Holiday rentals](#)

DAY 5: JACÓ BEACH, CARARA AND RÍO CLARO TO MANUEL ANTONIO (CONTINUED)

Where to eat

Fuego Brew Co.

American/Costa Rican fusion · Lunch · \$\$

Stop here halfway through your drive in Esparza. Good burgers, cold beer, 15 minutes off the highway.

[Google Maps >](#)

El Avellano

Costa Rican · Dinner · \$\$

Manuel Antonio town. Rice and beans done properly, fresh fish, family-run. Kids eat free after 6pm.

[Google Maps >](#)

Café Milagro

Café/Light meals · Breakfast · \$

Right in town. Excellent coffee, fresh pastries, early opening. Fuel up before heading to park tomorrow.

[Google Maps >](#)

TOURS & DAY TRIPS FROM MANUEL ANTONIO

3-4 HOURS

Manuel Antonio National Park guided wildlife walk

A naturalist guide spots animals your eyes would miss and keeps kids safe on jungle trails while you see sloths, monkeys, iguanas, and tropical birds.

[Book now](#)

FULL DAY

Nauyaca Waterfall hike and swim

Two waterfall pools nestled in rainforest, perfect for kids to jump, splash, and cool off after a hike; the lower pool is shallow and safe.

[Book now](#)

3-4 HOURS

Catamaran sunset cruise from Quepos

Calm waters in February make this safe for families; you'll see dolphins, fish, and the coast from the water while the kids snack and play.

[Book now](#)

FULL DAY

Arenal hot springs and rainforest tour from Manuel Antonio

A day trip to natural geothermal pools where you soak in warm water surrounded by jungle; guides often combine it with a short hike and wildlife spotting.

[Book now](#)

2-3 HOURS

Zip-lining canopy tour in the Quepos area

Kids aged 8+ love flying over the treetops on cables; guides are safety-focused and you'll spot wildlife from above.

[Book now](#)

Manuel Antonio National Park and Reptilandia

Sunrise 5:57 AM

Golden hour 5:18 PM

Sunset 5:47 PM

Sleep in Manuel Antonio · night 2 of 3

Spend the morning in the park and on Playa Manuel Antonio, have a coffee break at Cafe Milagro, then visit the animals at Parque Reptilandia.

1

7:45 AM · 3 hours

Book ahead

Manuel Antonio National Park

\$30 · Open 7 AM-4 PM

Three connected beaches with howler monkeys, sloths and scarlet macaws in the canopy. The rainforest canopy loops above the sand, so you're swimming and hiking in one go. Park gates open at 7 AM; arrive before 8 to beat tour groups. Drive 5 minutes from central Manuel Antonio or walk 15 minutes downhill from town.

Insider tip: Skip the main Playa Espadilla entrance. Pay the entrance fee at the ranger station on the left side of town and walk in via the back trail; fewer crowds and better wildlife encounters.

Book tickets

Open in Google Maps >

2

10:45 AM · 1 hour

Playa Manuel Antonio

Free

The park's best beach: a crescent of tan sand backed by jungle headland. Swim in clear water, spot white-faced capuchins raiding picnic bags, and look for iguanas on the rocks. You're already here from the park walk; plan 1 hour on the sand.

Insider tip: Bring reef shoes; the rocks are sharp. Mid-morning sun is harsh, so apply sunscreen heavily and don't linger past noon.

Open in Google Maps >

3

12:00 PM · 1 hour

Cafe Milagro Manuel Antonio

\$28-47 for coffee and food · Open 6 AM-9 PM

Casual beachfront cafe with strong coffee, fresh fruit plates and fish ceviche. Tables overlook Playa Espadilla and the jungle canopy. A 10-minute walk uphill and west from Playa Manuel Antonio through town.

Insider tip: Order the casado (traditional plate) with catch of the day, not just tourist fare. Sit on the upper deck for shade and a view.

Open in Google Maps >

4

2:00 PM · 1.5 hours

Parque Reptilandia

\$28 · Open 9:30 AM-4:30 PM

Small reptile park with snakes, crocodiles, frogs and spiders; perfect for kids who want to get close without jungle risk. Well-organised, shaded walkways, and staff explain each species. A 5-minute drive south of central Manuel Antonio on the main road.

Insider tip: Go early afternoon when the animals are more active than in morning heat. The poison dart frog exhibit and crocodile pool are the highlights for kids.

[Book tickets](#)

[Open in Google Maps >](#)

5

5:00 PM · 1 hour

Playa Espadilla

Free

Wide, calm beach with gentle waves and soft sand. Rent a beach chair, let the kids play, and watch howler monkeys in the palm trees at the tree line. Return from Reptilandia and walk down from your central hotel (5 minutes) or park at the main beach entrance.

Insider tip: Arrive by 5:15 PM to catch the last golden hour light and watch the sun dip toward the ocean. The monkey calls intensify at dusk.

[Open in Google Maps >](#)

[Open Day 6 as a route in Google Maps](#)

Where to eat

Fuego Brew Co.

Breakfast/Brunch · Breakfast · \$\$

Casual spot near the park entrance. Get eggs and fresh fruit, strong coffee for early hikes.

[Google Maps >](#)

El Avion

Seafood/International · Lunch · \$\$

Right by the beach with park views. Fresh ceviche and grilled fish. Kids menu available, great for refueling.

[Google Maps >](#)

Barba Roja

Costa Rican/Seafood · Dinner · \$\$

Waterfront spot in town. Grill-fired catch of the day and rice bowls. Sunset timing is perfect here.

[Google Maps >](#)

Quepos, Isla Caño Snorkel and Playa Espadilla Sur

Sunrise 5:57 AM

Golden hour 5:18 PM

Sunset 5:47 PM

Sleep in Manuel Antonio · night 3 of 3

Browse the Quepos fish market, head out from the waterfront to snorkel at Isla Caño, then end with a beer at Fuego Brew Co and a beach stop.

1

6:30 AM · 45 minutes

Quepos Fish Market

Free · Open 5 AM-1 PM

Arrive early to watch fishing boats unload the night's catch and grab fresh ceviche for breakfast. The market's loudest around 6:30-7:30 AM. Five minutes' drive north from Manuel Antonio town centre.

Insider tip: Order ceviche at the counter stall on the left; ask for the catch of the day, not the pre-made batch.

[Open in Google Maps >](#)

2

7:15 AM · 5 hours

Book ahead

Isla Caño snorkel tour departure (Quepos waterfront)

\$225-280 per person

Join a boat heading to Isla Caño, an underwater reserve 20km offshore with turtles, rays, grouper and healthy coral. Tours run 7-8 AM departures and return by noon. Book the night before or arrive by 7 AM at the dock near the market.

Insider tip: Request a spot on the smaller catamaran (max 12 people), not the big boat, for calmer rides and better wildlife spotting.

[Book tickets](#)
[Open in Google Maps >](#)

3

12:30 PM · 1 hour

Fuego Brew Co

\$19-38 for drinks and food · Open 11 AM-11 PM

Land-back brewery and restaurant in Quepos with cold craft beers and grilled fish tacos. Grab lunch here after your snorkel tour, around noon or 1 PM, to dry off and refuel. On the main street near the market.

Insider tip: Order the taco platter and ask for the IPA brewed with local passion fruit if it's on tap.

[Open in Google Maps >](#)

4

2:00 PM · 2 hours

Playa Espadilla Sur

Free

The best beach within Manuel Antonio National Park itself: a sheltered sandy cove with rockpools, no riptide, and easy access. Kids can hunt starfish and sea urchins in the shallows. Drive 10 minutes south into the park; use the park entrance (small fee) or park near the ranger station.

Insider tip: Go low tide (check tide tables the night before) to see the most rockpools; wear water shoes to protect feet from sea urchins.

[Open in Google Maps >](#)

5

4:45 PM · 1.5 hours

Sunset walk at Punta Catedral viewpoint

Free

Hike the rocky trail up Punta Catedral for sweeping views of the Pacific and the park's three islands. The trail is 30 minutes uphill from Playa Espadilla Sur; catch the last hour of light for gold-hour photos and a peaceful finish. No shade, so bring water.

Insider tip: Start the hike by 4:45 PM to reach the top by 5:15 PM; you'll have golden light until sunset at 5:47 PM.

[Open in Google Maps >](#)

[Open Day 7 as a route in Google Maps](#)

Where to eat

Fuego Brew Co

Breakfast/Brunch · Breakfast · \$\$

Early start fuel: strong coffee, eggs, fresh fruit. Open 6:30am.

[Google Maps >](#)

El Avion Restaurant & Bar

Seafood · Lunch · \$\$

Waterfront views, fresh ceviche and grilled fish. Right after snorkeling.

[Google Maps >](#)

Sibu Cafe

International · Dinner · \$\$

Casual spot, family-friendly. Fish tacos and fresh juice. Golden hour views.

[Google Maps >](#)

What should I know about driving in Costa Rica?

Drive on the right

Kilometres; speed limits in km/h

Licence: Unless your licence is from the EU, bring an International Driving Permit (IDP) with it: rental desks and police expect one here. Most rental companies need you to be 21 or older and charge extra under 25.

- Speed limits are 50 km/h in towns, 100 km/h on highways; police use speed cameras and hand signals.
- Many roads are narrow, potholed, or unpaved; drive slowly and assume blind corners around hills.
- Seatbelts mandatory for all passengers; kids under 12 need a car seat, which most rental companies provide.

[Book a rental car](#)

Will my kids see wildlife?

Very likely. February is dry and warm, so animals are active and visible. Howler monkeys, sloths, toucans, and poison dart frogs are common on any trail. Book a guide for the best spotting odds.

What's the best waterfall for swimming with children?

La Fortuna Waterfall is the most family-friendly: 70 metres of water, a natural pool at the base, and well-maintained trails with stairs. The hike is 45 minutes down, steep but doable for older kids (8+). Tabacón hot springs nearby mix bathing with wildlife viewing.

Can I see Arenal Volcano clearly in February?

February is the clearest month. You'll see the peak most days, especially early morning before clouds roll in. It hasn't erupted since 2010 but is still active, so stay on designated trails.

What's the weather like in La Fortuna in February?

Expect 25-28°C (77-82°F) during the day, cooler in the evenings. Pack light layers, a rain jacket (afternoon showers still happen), sturdy hiking shoes, and swimwear. Sunscreen is non-negotiable.

Do people speak English in La Fortuna?

Spoken here: Spanish. English is widely spoken in La Fortuna town, hotels, and tour operators, but less common in rural areas and small villages.

Useful phrases:

- Hola (OH-la): hello
- Gracias (GRAH-see-ahs): thank you
- ¿Cuánto cuesta? (KWAN-toh KWES-tah): how much does it cost?
- Agua con hielo (AH-gwah cone ee-EH-lo): water with ice
- ¿Dónde está la cascada? (DON-deh es-TAH la kahs-KAH-dah): where is the waterfall?

Is La Fortuna safe for visitors?

La Fortuna is very safe for tourists. Watch out for slippery trails after rain and keep distance from wildlife (especially sloths and snakes, though encounters are rare).

BEFORE YOU GO (CONTINUED)

What's the emergency number in Costa Rica?

Call 911 for police, ambulance or fire.

Do you tip in Costa Rica?

Tipping isn't obligatory but is appreciated. Leave 10% at restaurants if service was good, round up for taxis, and tip tour guides 500-1000 colones (about \$1-2 USD) per person per tour.

What do only locals know about La Fortuna?

- Start hikes early (6-7am) when wildlife is most active and before afternoon rain rolls in.
- Book hot springs tours in advance during February; they fill up fast and the best spots (like Tabacon) require reservations.
- Rent a 4WD vehicle if you plan to explore beyond main roads; some routes to waterfalls are rough after any rain.
- The nearest beaches (Manuel Antonio or Puerto Viejo) are 3-4 hours away; visit if you have time, but the volcano and rainforest are the real draw here.

BEFORE YOU GO: MANUEL ANTONIO

What should I know about driving in Costa Rica?

Drive on the right

Kilometres; speed limits in km/h

Licence: Unless your licence is from the EU, bring an International Driving Permit (IDP) with it: rental desks and police expect one here. Most rental companies need you to be 21 or older and charge extra under 25.

- Speed cameras are common on the coastal highway. Stick to 60 km/h in towns, 100 km/h on highways.
- Roads are potholed and narrow inland. Avoid night driving; animals cross, locals speed, and darkness makes potholes invisible.
- Seat belts are mandatory for all passengers. Police will stop you if kids aren't properly belted.

[Book a rental car](#)

Will my kids actually see animals in the jungle?

Yes, but only with an early start and a patient guide. Book a private naturalist guide (25,000-35,000/\$45-65 for a family) who knows where sloths hang and will find macaws. Group tours are louder and less reliable. Bring binoculars.

How do I get to the hot springs waterfall?

Hire a driver or join a tour to Termales El Chontales (book through your hotel or a local tour operator). It's 45 minutes from Manuel Antonio and includes a 20-meter waterfall you can swim under, plus natural hot pools. Go in the afternoon (2-4pm) to avoid crowding and heat.

Is the road to Manuel Antonio really that bad?

Yes, it's steep, narrow, and potholed. A 4WD is essential in rainy season, strongly recommended in dry season. Drive slowly, watch for oncoming traffic on blind curves, and avoid driving after dark.

What's the weather like in Manuel Antonio in February?

Expect 27-32°C (81-90°F) and almost no rain. Pack light clothes, swimwear, reef-safe sunscreen, and a light rain jacket just in case.

Do people speak English in Manuel Antonio?

Spoken here: Spanish. English is widely spoken in hotels, restaurants, and tour companies, but learning a few phrases helps and is appreciated.

Useful phrases:

- Hola (OH-lah): hello
- Gracias (GRAH-see-ahs): thank you
- ¿Cuánto cuesta? (KWAN-toh KWES-tah): how much does it cost?
- Agua (AH-wah): water
- ¿Dónde está la playa? (DON-deh es-TAH lah PLAH-yah): where is the beach?

Is Manuel Antonio safe for visitors?

Petty theft from rental cars is common, so never leave valuables visible. Stick to marked trails in the national park and always use a guide for jungle hikes.

What's the emergency number in Costa Rica?

Call 911 for police, ambulance or fire.

Do you tip in Costa Rica?

Tip 10-15% at restaurants if service isn't included. Tour guides and drivers appreciate 10-20% if they've done well. It's not mandatory but expected in tourist areas.

What do only locals know about Manuel Antonio?

- Head to the national park before 8am to spot wildlife; once the heat peaks, animals rest and disappear.
- Catamaran sunset tours leave from Quepos marina most days and cost around 80,000 colones (\$150) per adult, half price for kids under 12.
- The squirrel monkeys here are found nowhere else on Earth; your kids will go wild for them.
- Bring reef-safe sunscreen and rinse off in freshwater after swimming to avoid sea lice irritation.