



Arenal & Northern Lowlands

Includes ➔

La Fortuna	248
Parque Nacional Volcán Arenal	259
El Castillo	261
Laguna de Arenal	263
Los Chiles	269
Upala	273
Muelle de San Carlos	275
Venecia	277
Boca Tapada Area	277
Sarapiquí Valley	278

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Restaurant Don Rufino (p257)
- ➔ Rainforest Café (p256)
- ➔ Gingerbread Hotel & Restaurant (p265)
- ➔ Café y Macadamia (p267)

Best Wildlife-Watching

- ➔ Ecocentro Danaus (p248)
- ➔ Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre Caño Negro (p271)
- ➔ Chilamate Rainforest Eco Retreat (p281)
- ➔ Estación Biológica La Selva (p285)

Why Go?

You know about the region's main attraction: the now-dormant Volcán Arenal, surrounded by old lava fields, bubbling hot springs and a stunning lake. Venture further onto the wild rivers and into the tropical jungle of the northern lowlands and you will discover real-life Costa Rica, where agricultural commerce and ecological conservation converge as a work in green progress. Stretching from the borderlands of Nicaragua south to the Cordillera de Tilarán, banana, sugarcane and pineapple *fincas* (farms) roll across humid plains. Community tourism lives and breathes here, creating added revenue for a historically farm-based economy. You can spot a macaw in the wild, paddle into roaring rapids and cruise inky lagoons, all with lifelong resident guides, then nest in lodges that double as private rainforest reserves. When the tourist hordes get you down, make your way here for a refreshing blast of rural realism and an invigorating dose of wild beauty.

When to Go

- ➔ There's no dry season in the northern lowlands: the lush jungles surrounding the rivers in the region, such as the Río Frio and the Río Sarapiquí, receive rainfall at almost any time of year.
- ➔ There is a less-wet season, though, from January to April, when rainfall is lower.
- ➔ Because there's so much rain, you can run the rivers any time of year, but they flow faster from July to December.

Arenal & Northern Lowlands Highlights

- 1 Hiking up the Cerro Chato at **Parque Nacional Volcán Arenal** (p259) and gazing across the turquoise-blue crater lake at its summit.
- 2 Marvelling at sweeping lake and volcano views from your perch in **El Castillo** (p261).
- 3 Exploring the lagoons of the **Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre Caño Negro** (p271) to take a gander at spoonbills or a stab at tarpon.
- 4 Riding the rapids through the jungle on the **Río Sarapiquí** (p280).
- 5 Spotting howlers, sloths, peccaries and all manner of birdlife while exploring the grounds of your ecodge near **Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí** (p283).

