



# Arenal & Northern Lowlands

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## Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Restaurant Don Rufino (p254)
- ➔ Benedictus Steakhouse (p254)
- ➔ La Ventanita (p259)
- ➔ Gingerbread Hotel & Restaurant (p265)

## Best Wildlife-Watching

- ➔ Arenal Natura (p245)
- ➔ Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre Caño Negro (p268)
- ➔ Chilamate Rainforest Eco Retreat (p280)
- ➔ Estación Biológica La Selva (p282)

## Why Go?

You know about the region's main attraction: that now-dormant volcano, 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, *fincas* (farms) of banana, sugarcane and pineapple 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 there's lower rainfall.
- ➔ Because there's so much rain, you can run the rivers any time of year, but they flow faster from July to December.
- ➔ Wildlife also abounds year-round, but skies will be clearer and trails less muddy from January to April.
- ➔ Fun *sabanero* street festivals take place in La Fortuna in February and in Ciudad Quesada (San Carlos) in April.

## Arenal & Northern Lowlands Highlights

- 1 Hiking up the Cerro Chato at **Parque Nacional Volcán Arenal** (p256) and gazing across the turquoise-blue crater lake at its summit.
- 2 Soothing your weary muscles with a soak in volcano-heated pools at **Eco Termales Hot Springs** (p245).
- 3 Marvelling at sweeping lake or volcano views from your perch in charming **El Castillo** (p257).
- 4 Getting up close and personal with orphaned or injured wild animals at **Proyecto Asis** (p276).
- 5 Getting down and dirty while exploring the underworld in the **Venado Caves** (p275).
- 6 Exploring the lagoons, counting caimans and spying on spoonbills at the **Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre Caño Negro** (p268).
- 7 Listening to the racket made by great green macaws hanging at the almendros trees at **Boca Tapada** (p275).
- 8 Getting thrills and chills while riding the rapids of the **Río Sarapiquí** (p278).
- 9 **Wildlife-spotting** (p279) for howlers, sloths, peccaries and birdlife while exploring the grounds of your ecolodge.

