

Península de Osa & Golfo Dulce



Locals and tourists alike regard this remote enclave in the extreme southwestern corner of the country as the most picturesque, the most pristine and the most perfect spot in Costa Rica. Centered on Parque Nacional Corcovado, which contains one of the continent's last remaining patches of Pacific rainforest, and shaped by the serene waters of the wildlife-rich Golfo Dulce, the entire peninsula operates as a vast biological corridor. Not surprisingly, *National Geographic* famously labeled Corcovado as 'the most biologically intense place on earth.'

Although much of the rainforest in Costa Rica is protected by the national park system, no other region of the country can offer the breadth and extent of wildlife found in Osa. In Corcovado, it's sometimes possible to see all four native species of monkey swinging in the canopy overhead, while rare animals such as Baird's tapir can be spotted regularly. Indeed, the Osa peninsula is Costa Rica at its finest, and striking evidence that there is an intrinsic value and beauty of the rainforest that is worth saving.

Beyond Corcovado, the Osa peninsula captivates travelers with its abandoned wilderness beaches, world-class surf and endless opportunities for rugged exploration. In a country where adventure is all too often downgraded and packaged for tourist consumption, Osa is the real deal. Simply put, it's a place for travelers with youthful hearts, intrepid spirits and a yearning for something truly wild. If you've been growing old in a concrete jungle, spend some time in this verdant one – just be sure to bring a good pair of boots, a sturdy tent and some serious quantities of bug spray!

HIGHLIGHTS

- Testing your survival skills by trekking across **Parque Nacional Corcovado** (p421), the country's premier wilderness experience
- Exploring the dense jungles that fringe the crystalline waters of **Bahía Drake** (p395)
- Catching a ride on the world's longest left break at the undiscovered surfing paradise that is **Pavones** (p435)
- Watching the sun rise over the Golfo Dulce and set over the Pacific from the deserted beaches on **Cabo Matapalo** (p418)
- Diving off the coastlines of the far-flung **Isla del Cocos** (p438), the on-screen location of *Jurassic Park*



History

While the Guaymí were the earliest inhabitants of the Osa (for more information see boxed text, p413), the vast majority of the peninsula was never populated or developed by Ticos (Costa Ricans). In fact, because of the remoteness of the region, commercial logging was never a threat until the early 1960s.

Although this tumultuous decade saw the destruction of much of Costa Rica's remaining primary forests, Osa was largely spared. By 1975, however, international companies were greedily eyeing the peninsula's natural resources, namely its vast timber and gold reserves. Fortunately, these self-interested ambitions were halted when researchers petitioned President Daniel Oduber to establish a national park. Following the creation of Parque Nacional Corcovado, Oduber received the Albert Schweitzer Award from the Animal Welfare Institute for his much-applauded actions.

In recent years, the peninsula has attracted the attention of wealthy foreigners who want to trade in their workaday world for a piece of paradise. Prime real estate is being snatched up, and it's inevitable that things are set to change in Osa as they have in the rest of Costa Rica. However, there is hope that development will be more sustainable in this part of the country, particularly since there is a vested interest in keeping the peninsula green. For a local perspective on the changes in the region, see boxed text, p436.

Climate

The Osa peninsula has two drastically different seasons: the rainy season and the dry season. During the rainy season (mid-April to mid-December) the amount of precipitation is astounding, with most months boasting more than 500mm. Even in the dry season, better described as the 'less rainy season,' you can expect a good downfall every now and again, especially while trekking through Corcovado.

Parks & Reserves

As the country's premier ecotourism destination, the Península de Osa is home to a plethora of parks, reserves and wildlife refuges.

Humedal Nacional Térraba-Sierpe (p393) Approximately 330 sq km of protected mangrove wetlands that harbor numerous species of aquatic birds.

Parque Nacional Corcovado (p421) This national park, which occupies a great bulk of the peninsula, is Osa's

shining crown jewel, and one of Costa Rica's last true wilderness areas.

Parque Nacional Isla del Cocos (p438) Visually stunning, utterly pristine and – by far – the country's most remote and difficult spot to access.

Parque Nacional Piedras Blancas (p432) Formerly known as Parque Nacional Esquinas, this contains one of the last remaining stretches of lowland rainforest in the country.

Refugio Nacional de Fauna Silvestre Golfito (p429) This tiny 28-sq-km reserve surrounding the town of Golfito is home to rare cycads or living plant fossils.

Reserva Biológica Isla del Caño (p402) A tiny marine and terrestrial park in Bahía Drake that is a popular destination for snorkelers, divers and biologists.

Reserva Forestal Golfo Dulce (p403) On the northern shore of Golfo Dulce, this is an important biological corridor for migrating wildlife.

Reserva Indígena Guaymí (see boxed text, p413) Home to the vast majority of the peninsula's indigenous communities, though most of the reserve is not open to tourism.

Dangers & Annoyances

The greatest hazard in Osa is the difficult environment, particularly in Parque Nacional Corcovado. Trails are generally well marked but it can be difficult going at times, especially if you're not accustomed to wilderness navigation. Also, the many large rivers that run through the park create their own hazards, especially if they're running swift in the rainy season. Any help at all, much less medical help, is very far away – if you get lost out here, you have a serious problem on your hands.

To minimize these risks, it's recommended that you explore Corcovado either as part of an organized tour or with the help of a local guide. Hiring a knowledgeable guide will also provide up-to-date information on potential hazards, and it provides safety through numbers.

Areas of Corcovado are also prime territory for the deadly fer-de-lance snake. The chance of getting bitten is remote, but you should be careful – always wear boots while walking in the forest.

Although they don't carry Lyme disease, ticks are also everywhere in Corcovado. In reality, they're nothing more than a nuisance, though you'd be wise to bring a good pair of tweezers and a few books of matches. If you're not traveling with a buddy, a pocket mirror will also help as these little buggers have a habit of turning up in some rather uncomfortable places.