

## Testimonials

*"I just wanted to write to you and say thank you for yet another fabulous trip.*

*Every year I look forward to my trip to Costa Rica and every year it goes well - everything goes according to plan, the guests always seem happy and we always see tons of stuff and well - it is I think perhaps the easiest trip I lead!!*

*I know that for trips where I am the main guide and we are running the whole thing ourselves and have to make the decisions etc they are bound to feel more stressful (if that's the right word - I don't on the whole get very stressed to be honest) but there are many other trips I have led where we are using ground agents and I just wanted to tell you that no-one else does it as well as you guys. (At least in my experience!) It is quite simply a pleasure to lead this trip with you Paco. Your great sense of humour and relaxed manner with the guests, the way you involve me in some of the decisions, your enthusiasm for the wildlife (which lets face it you have seen over and over again yet you always seem delighted to see) in fact the whole way you run the trip - it is just perfect. And don't underestimate how much your manner brings the group together and makes everyone enjoy themselves - they feel they are in good hands and can relax and laugh and enjoy the wildlife with no worries at all.*

*I am sat here just now editing the trip report and re-living the trip and it just made me want to write to say thank you for another excellent trip and for making sure everything ran so smoothly. After eight years (or is it nine?) I know how it can be with some other leaders and ground agents so I know when it is right... and you guys are spot on." **Roy Adkins, Speyside Wildlife Leader, Winter 2010***

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*"Dear Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris and Cotinga Tours,*

*Thank you for a spectacular trip to Costa Rica! It could not have happened at a better time for me, as I was out of work last summer and am again between jobs now; it really felt like a miracle that I should win this prize when my financial situation is at an all time low. And what a trip!!! I had heard about this trip from friends a few years ago so I thought I had some of idea of what to expect, but it way exceeded anything I could have imagined. Thank you for supporting San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory with this awesome prize to encourage people like me to raise money for bird science.*

*Here is a link to my photos from the trip:"*

*<http://share.shutterstock.com/action/welcome?sid=8SbM27dm1afM> **Karen DeMello, Winter 2010***

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*"A huge thank you - we had an amazing trip and all your arrangements were perfect. Everything went very smoothly and we all had a truly amazing time. You live in a very beautiful country but I am sure you don't need me to tell you that.*

*Anyway, thank you so much for all your help. We will be back to Costa Rica again and will be sure to contact you." **Clare Beswick, Winter 2010***

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*"My wife and I had a great time on our trip. The birds are truly amazing. Erick is an outstanding guide and fine young man. Erick did everything in his power to make sure everyone saw each and every bird he could find. We also had an outstanding driver named Alberto. I recommended Cotinga to one of my friends this morning. Maybe next time my wife and I can make the last two stops on the trip." **Ed Simpson, Winter 2010***

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“My husband and I just returned from your wonderful Birding Highlights trip. Erick Castro, our guide, is truly a charmer of birds. Gifted with remarkable eyes and ears, a lightening-quick hand on the spotting scope and infinite patience, he drew out for us to hear and see the shyest and most elusive birds from the floor of the rainforest and the birds that flit like dots of color in the canopies. He made every effort to try to assure that each member of the group saw each bird. Finally, he was generous in sharing with us his very considerable knowledge about the flora and fauna of Costa Rica. And we have nothing but praise for Alberto, too, who has sharp eyes for birds as well as the road, and who was wonderfully warm and helpful. Had we gone to Costa Rica to bird alone--an option we considered--we would have seen, much less properly identified, only a fraction of the 300 plus birds that are now on our list. And we would not have had the pleasure of getting to know Erick and Alberto. We are very glad we chose Cotinga!” **Christina Clayton and Stanley Kolber, Winter 2010**

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“Dear Paco, Alison and I want to thank you so much for the memorable time you gave us, aided magnificently by Carlos whose expert driving even when he was searching the skies and trees was superb as was his warmth and concern for us all.

Thank you for opening our eyes to so much: the birds, the animals, the different flowers and trees. You were marvellously patient with our endless questions and repeated requests for information that we had asked you the day before. Your own enthusiasm for nature and your delight when you saw birds you had not seen in the area before or even seeing the familiar bird were infectious. I have not done any birding except on the coach since we got back. However I did see a red kite as we came through the cutting on the Chilterns and as I watched noted some house sparrows in a ploughed field some distance away. I put this down to our work in the forests when it was v.hard to make out birds in the undergrowth. You taught us patience in the pursuit of a bird and I am sure that I have become more able to see things, how ever small they are. Thank you for all you did for us; you went the extra mile for us all the time. The visit to Cope's was a marvellous time. To see a white-throated crane, a spectacled owl and then a sunbittern so closely was a fantastic finale to the trip. Cope's picture is off to the framer tomorrow: it was amazing to have seen the laughing falcon only the day before as the light was going, another exciting moment of a myriad of fantastic sightings. I could go on, but I am sure you will want to get on with preparing for tomorrow's trip and to recharge the batteries as well having time with your delightful family.

Thank you so much again for an unbelievably wonderful experience no a holiday of a lifetime. It is going to be difficult to find another holiday to match this one.” **David Aldred, Winter 2010**

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“Dear Paco, Thank you once again for making our recent holiday to Costa Rica so memorable. We had a marvellous time and it was due largely to your excellent organisation and, especially, your fantastic birding skills. How you found some of those birds we will never know, and we do appreciate the special efforts you made to find us some of the more elusive ones. on top of that, you gave us a really good feel for your country and its people. Please, also, pass on our thanks to Carlos. He, too, played a big part in the success of the trip.” **Roger and Imogen Theobald, Winter 2010**

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“Thank you so much for an unforgettable experience with Cotinga Tours in Costa Rica. Beginning with Marco Frid, who spent extra time and effort booking me within a few weeks of departure; he could have turned me down, but chose to deal with rebooking the rooms so I could join the Birding Highlights tour January 25 - February 5, 2010.

Erick Castro and Alberto Vargas were a spectacular team. From the moment they picked up their 'charges' at the San Jose Airport, to the moment they dropped us there for our return flight. Members of the group quickly noticed that our DRIVER Alberto was an expert birder, and we were going to be in for a fabulous tour! 350 bird species + 10 audibles. Incredible!

I would have to say this was a special trip, (and I've been on many outside the US) made possible by the extra effort Erick and Alberto made to insure every tour member was happy. It was also obvious that Erick and Alberto have high regard and respect for each other. With a group of twelve people and twelve days, it is absolutely inevitable that small 'speed bumps' occur in such a variable schedule, with reservations, timing, or communication. These were easily solved by these two gentlemen, handled well and with little stress to the group. In fact, the group of 12 was so happy, we are all still in touch with each other!

Cotinga tours is a very professional, classy operation. I intend on advertising that to anyone in the Pacific Northwest who is going to bird Costa Rica!” **Donna Poppe, Winter 2010**

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“We wanted to let you know how much we enjoyed our " Birding Highlights" trip with Cotinga Tours and Erick Castro. Erick was outstanding. He had the eyes of an eagle and the knowledge of an encyclopedia. He was very organized, patient and persistent to make sure that we had the best experience possible. He was so fast at setting up the scope to make sure that we got the best possible view of each bird we saw. He kept us on a very strict schedule to maximize the number of birds that we would see. We also were very impressed with our driver, Albierto. He had a great rapport with Erick and he was a lot of fun and also a great birder himself. We were especially fond of Basque de Paz, Arenal, and of course, the Bougainvillea. The boat rides were a great extra and we would recommend this tour to anyone who has similar interests. There was the expected variety of people in our group from serious birders to more casual bird watchers and I think everyone was pleased with the trip. If we have any recommendations for you it would be to have more communication before the trip with the list of what to bring etc. Add to the communication that people should not bring colorful clothes which might scare the birds. Cotton pants and shirt are a must and be prepared for temperature extremes. On our trip, it varied from in the 90's to almost the 40's. Erick prefers that people bring umbrellas instead of plastic panchos as they can make you sweaty. I would add to the list to bring hand sanitizer for public toilets. I think every place had soap and a hair dryer. Several places did not provide wash (face) cloths, so you might add that to the list of things to bring. Again, we loved our trip” **Judy Spahn and Bruce Wolck, Winter 2010**

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“We just want to let everyone know that we thoroughly enjoyed the entire experience. The tour was well organized and run, the lodges really nice, and the choice of places to visit allowed us to see a great variety of birdlife.

For us, the highlight of the tour was having Erick as our guide. He has an amazing knowledge of birds and other flora and fauna of the region. To our delight, Erick was able---seemingly out of nowhere!--- to find, quickly spot on his scope, and identify for us an amazing number of wonderful birds. He was also very patient with those of us who were not expert bird-watchers, and, as a result, we came away with a much better appreciation of the skills needed to best enjoy this wonderful activity. We noticed that other leaders of bird tours at the lodges often came to Erick for advice and help on issues of birds and other wildlife, and we felt particularly blessed to have the very best as our own guide!

We also give high marks and our gratitude to our driver Alberto Vargas who not only got us everywhere safely but also proved to be a masterful birder himself!” **Debby Delmer and John Hirst, Birding Highlights, Feb 2009**

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“Once again many thanks for a truly excellent tour. The organization was faultless and once again I was mesmerized by your fantastic skills Paco. Linda and myself really enjoyed being with you and I know I echo the views of everyone on the trip. Carlos was also as brilliant as ever.” **Keith Offord (Owner, Wild Insights) Feb. 2009**

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“A big thank you for a fantastic fortnight in Costa Rica, it exceeded all that I could have ever imagined. You showed us birds that would have remained " invisible" to the majority and your organization and hospitality made it a memorable trip. thanks also to Carlos in whose hands we all felt totally safe in spite of some of the driving conditions, and thanks to Costa Rica for maintaining the wealth of wildlife that is there.

I hope to see you at the Bird fair by which time the "snow" that we arrived home to will have gone but probably replaced by rain!” **Ron Foster, Southern Sensations 2009**

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“Paco, you outdid yourself with our tour. Every single person enjoyed it to the hilt! They raved about the whole experience, and especially about YOU. You have great knowledge and your personality suits you for your profession - your enthusiasm is infectious. We laughed hard, learned a lot, and loved Costa Rica. All in all it was an ideal vacation. THANK YOU from the bottom of our hearts.” **Jane Dahmen, Private Nature Tour Dec. 2008**

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*“Just wanted to say thank you once again to Paco and Carlos for a fantastic 2 weeks in CR. I am amazed at the things Carlos can spot while driving, Paco's ability to impersonate every bird, and spot birds in the densest of forests. Paco's love for his country, his job and his attention to detail makes him a 1st class guide. The accommodations and food were also superb (despite the occasional loss of power!).*

*Please also give my thanks to Paco's friend who so kindly came out with us for the day to show us the Great Potoo.”*

**Anne McAskie, Southern Sensations 2009**

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*“Hope you are well, first of all i must say what a marvelous trip Ann and I had it was a holiday of a lifetime for which we thank you. We initially were disappointed not to be meeting Paco again, but your guide Erick was amazing his spotting ability and his vast knowledge of what we were seeing was incredible. Erick was seeing birds or animals that eight pair of eyes could not see till he shone his beam near them to highlight them. We must compliment you for using him as a guide. His knowledge of animals. plants, trees, and the history and geography of your country was second to none, anything he told us was always a very full explanation the whole of the group were very impressed. Erick is a credit and very good ambassador to your company.*

*We wish you all the very best and hope your business continues to flourish. Oh we almost forgot your driver Alberto, he is a credit to your business not only did he have a lovely sense of humor and very pleasing personality, but he was also a very good spotter.”* **David & Ann Smith, Birding Highlights Tour 2009**

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*“Just wanted to tell you that I had an incredible time on my tour in February. It was a dream trip for me in many ways. Erik was a great guide. Other than Paco, I cant imagine having someone who is more skilled, experienced, tireless and personable. What a great addition to the Cotinga family. Erik was incredibly patient and generous particularly with my endless attempts at IDing the calls and songs we heard. I must have identified Clay-colored Robin as a dozen different more interesting birds before seeing it each time.*

*I know you don't control the weather but it was spectacular and all the accommodations and food were excellent. Please thank Erik, Alberto and fellow who did my airport transfers (please tell him I made his mom's ceviche recipe last weekend and it came out great).”* **Eric Molho, Southern Sensations Tour 2009**

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*“Erick Castro was a first class guide and an excellent birder. He had a good personality and got on very well with the group. He showed a lot of courtesy and patience and was always very helpful.”* **Tom Gibbons (Trip Leader, Great Britain)**

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*“Fantastic trip! All returned safely home to cold UK. A Big THANK YOU to all concerned for the most wonderful birding trip ever! I have led numerous tours around the world but this one was by far the best. The organization was outstanding, the sites and lodges superb and the leader Erik was extremely professional, affable and an outstanding field ornithologist.*

*Everybody in the group were thrilled by seeing over 400 species and enjoying the magnificent Costa Rican countryside.”* **Derek Moore (Trip Leader, Great Britain) Private Tour (February 2008)**

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*“It was good writing the trip report as it made me re-live the holiday which must be one of the best if not THE best I have lead. I really enjoyed it so thank you again for making it so good.”* **Roy Atkins (trip leader: Speyside Wildlife, Great Britain) Life Birds Tour (Feb 2004)**

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*"The tour went very well and everyone on the tour enjoyed it very much. As I have told Paco and Heather the success of the tours is due to the planning and scheduling that the three of you put into it. You are the best tour company that I have worked with in Costa Rica. Many thanks for all that you do to make it work so smoothly."* **Ken Wilson, (Owner of Talon Tours), Birds of Paradise Tour (January 2005)**

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*"It seems hard to believe that 3 years has passed since I participated in the birding tour of Costa Rica! Since then I have had a chance to go out on tours by other companies and must take the time to tell you that, in comparison, your tour was magnificent. You provided the right combination of birding and travel at a pace that was enjoyable yet one that yielded a phenomenal number of birds. I appreciate that we often stayed 2 or 3 days at the same lodgings and often had relaxing time during the hottest part of the day where we could shower, work on our lists while the birds were fresh in our minds, and even do some butterflying! You have great patience and I appreciate that you took the time to explain the bird identifications.*

*In comparison, I have been on tours where the guides kept us out in the field from sun up to sun down just so that we could say that we got a high bird count. The pace was so fast that we couldn't even enjoy the birds but rather were always going on to the next new bird. At the end of the day we just collapsed on our beds. On another tour, it seemed that all we did was travel in the van. Many days we birded for only 3 or 4 hours; one day we birded for only an hour! We changed hotels almost every night.*

*Well, you get the idea. You put on a good tour!"* **Bob Grosek, Binghamton, NY**

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*"Just a belated thank you for a wonderfully organized and brilliantly led birding experience. Costa Rica is a bird watcher's paradise and I don't believe any one could have revealed it to us so skillfully. As I told Paco, if he and/or Marco would like to spend a night (or two) here when they come over in August I would be delighted. My house on the Thames is 15 minutes from Heathrow airport and 10 miles from Piccadilly Circus. I'll happily meet the plane. Paco really should see the Natural History Museum which is easily reached from here."* **Colin Hunter, England, Birds of Paradise Tour (January 2005)**

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*"Our trip was fabulous! Everything about it was better than expected, but most of all, Paco, Heather, and Alberto were extraordinary."* **Marilyn Nasatir, Birds of Paradise Tour (January 2004)**

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*"Thanks so much for the wonderful trip. I think everyone enjoyed themselves...I know I sure did! You run a first class operation and I encourage you to keep up the good work. Everything was marvelous--logistics, locations, knowledge, etc., etc. A special thank you goes out to Alberto. He is a fantastic person and a great driver and we all enjoyed having him with us. I wouldn't want it any other way. By the way, the final bird total was 301 species! Out of those, I saw 267 plus heard-only 10 more (ones I knew ahead of time). 54 species were AOU birds and that included 42 lifers. My 1000th AOU bird was Cinnamon Woodpecker and my 1025th was Green Hermit. Thanks for helping me reach my goal...and then some! Now, all I need is 20 more to hit 1500 on my world list! Think you can hook me up next March??? Thanks again for everything! It was a great trip and you should be proud of the company you're running and the people you work with."* **Joe Hammond (trip leader Ohio Wildlife Center and owner of Kestrel Tours) Caribbean Natural Treasures Tour (Sep. 2003)**

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"We made it home to Alexandria safe and sound and a bit wistful that our magical tour through Costa Rica with Paco and Heather had come to an end. From start to finish, it was, according to Daniel and Mark, the trip of the century. Paco, I can't imagine that there is a naturalist in Costa Rica who can come close to your knowledge and joy in sharing that knowledge. Heather, your enthusiasm, organizational skills and love of the environment played a tremendous role in making our visit such an enjoyable learning experience. Marc, your patience and willingness to work with George in the months beforehand, even with the discovery of an extra day to plan, made for a stress-free trip all around." **Paula Lader, Birds of Paradise Tour (July 2003)**

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"We just wanted to express to both of you our sincere thanks for the most wonderful experience with Cotinga Tours. This was beyond expectations. You have every reason to expect success in the future with the attention to detail this trip provided. All the accommodations were wonderful. The fact that we wanted to stay longer at each stop is testimony to that. And all the little touches, from Paco meeting us at the airport, to fresh cold fruits provided to hot/sweaty birders just off the trail, were thoughtful. Not to mention, Carlos smiling at the bus door to lend a hand. But of course, the birds and Paco's joyful enthusiasm, knowledge and skills are the real highlight. I can't wait to share the details with all my birding and non birding friends and tell them about the best guide in Costa Rica. We were honored to meet you Paco and share in your knowledge and love of your national living treasures." **Mary Ellen King: Life Birds Tour (Feb 2003)**

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"I wanted to say how delighted I was with the trip. It was absolutely spot on. I think the whole thing was excellent and I'm sure the guests must have enjoyed it as much as I did. I must say that from my point of view, as leader for Speyside Wildlife, I was very aware of how much organization and thought had gone into the trip and I felt we couldn't have been better looked after. To be honest you made my life very easy!!! A special word to Paco to say that he really is excellent, the best leader I have worked with, with not just an excellent knowledge of the birds but a great sense of humor and a lovely manner. I was particularly impressed with the way he remembered who had not seen particular birds and made sure that when one was seen again that person was called to the front to see it first next time. Well done and many many thanks." - **Roy Atkins (trip leader: Speyside Wildlife, Great Britain) Life Birds Tour (Feb 2003)**

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"The group didn't just have a successful trip they had a fantastic trip. Please pass on our very grateful thanks to Paco, who was a superb leader and worked really well with both Roy and our guests." **Sally of Speyside Wildlife, Great Britain.**

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"Would like to take this time on behalf of my group to express the deep appreciation for a successful tour that leading by you. It is true the excellent tour we ever had, as you know some of them did go with me to other places." **C-T of C-T Ecotour Workshop, Taiwan.**

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"Thanks for five excellent days in Costa Rica. Our experiences on this trip went well beyond anything we expected. Congratulations to Cotinga Tours for being extremely organized and customer focused. Your immediate follow-up to our initial inquiry provided us with a more focused agenda aligned with our desire to see a diversity of wildlife in Costa Rica in the short time we had available. We will actively inform others we know both socially and professionally about your exceptional services.

Paco, it was a pleasure to meet you. Your knowledge of the wildlife, culture, and history of Costa Rica provided us with a wealth of information that we will be absorbing and reflecting on for quite a while." **James Fava: 5 day tour (July 2002)**

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"Paco is an amazing guide. He knows the flora and fauna in addition to the birds. He can locate birds and relocate them when they fly off. He can even talk to the birds (no tapes are needed). I remember vividly Paco exchanging calls with a Nightingale Wren, Slaty-Breasted Tinamou and even a Black Hawk Eagle. Occasionally I needed to look at Paco to see if it was him or the bird that was calling." **Leo Hollien: Birds of Paradise Tour (Jan 2002)**

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"The tour was extra special in that we took our time and really saw some nice birds and behavior. We saw 68 species of which exactly half, 34, were lifers for us. The Purple-crowned Fairy was our gooth world bird. We also enjoyed the excellent lunch Paco provided, and are very pleased with the experience. I even got a few pictures of the Blue-crowned Manakin and the Pale-billed Woodpecker.

We do a lot of our birding in field trips with Audubon and the ABA. Organizing a field trip from an ocean cruise is a very different undertaking, but we are starting to be pretty good at it. When you only have five or six hours, and are under the gun to return to the ship, doing any birding at all seems a miracle. Your tour was the best by far." **Roger Van Ghent: Day Tour Carara, Dec 28 2001**

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"Even though it has been about a month since we finished the tour with you, wonderful memories linger. Without your help and guidance Paco, I would not have seen over 50% of the birds that were logged, and not been able to identify many of those seen or heard. Because of your keen sight and hearing, combined with your extensive knowledge of the natural history of your country, made that outing such a successful tour." **Irwin Woldman**