

## L4 | LIVING | TRAVEL

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Natural wonderlands of rainforest and untracked beaches await those who venture beyond Costa Rica's all-inclusive resorts, but reaching them is not always easy. Take heart: three boutique cruise ships offer access to pristine corners of Costa Rica and Panama this winter, each catering to a different style of eco-traveller.

#### A classic tall-ship experience

Plying the Pacific Coast of Costa Rica with yachtlike glamour, Star Clipper is an authentic but modern 150-metre barquentine driven by 16 impressive sails, making her a quiet, clean way to explore untouched nature.

Swedish sailing ship connoisseur Mikael Krafft drew on his real estate fortune to create Star Clippers, a line of classic tall ships that cruise far from the tourist crowds. "I wanted Star Clipper to feel like a private yacht, which is why the cabins are like those on my own yacht," Krafft says. The ship also boasts two small swimming pools, an Edwardian-style library, a baby grand piano, two bars, and wood-lined cabins for 166 passengers.

The line has won a loyal following of repeat passengers in their 40s and 50s, many of whom are recreational sailors. Passengers can climb to the crow's nest and help hauling lines. Or not.

One itinerary features rainforest hikes and secluded beaches in Corcovado National Park, seeking rare squirrel monkeys and toucans in Manuel Antonio National Park, and snorkelling at Coiba Island, once a prison and now a UNESCO World Heritage site. On alternating weeks, the ship stays within Costa Rican waters to pull up at renowned beaches, such as Playa Flamingo and Playa Potrero. A highlight is Isla Tortuga, a picture of paradise with pure white sand and turquoise waters.

#### An educational expedition

Lindblad Expeditions, the company credited with inventing expedi-



STAR CLIPPER

### CRUISING

# Small-ship sailing in COSTA RICA

Prefer troops of monkeys to crowds of tourists?  
Consider exploring aboard an eco-cruise

tion cruising, has now partnered with that other icon of discovery, the National Geographic Society, for immersive, educational eco-tours.

Catering to curious, fit retirees, the company's 100-passenger National Geographic Quest explores remote locales up and down the

**The classic tall ship Star Clipper explores the Pacific Coast along Costa Rica.**

Pacific Coast between Punta Arenas, Costa Rica and Panama City. Shipboard life revolves around lectures and learning, with no casino, disco or crowds.

Two days are devoted to the Osa Peninsula, home to Corcovado National Park, "the most biologically intense place on Earth," according

to National Geographic, and Golfo Dulce, North America's only tropical fiord. Hike into the jungle to spy sloths, monkeys and any number of Costa Rica's 850 bird species. Included is a visit with researchers at the Latin American Sea Turtles Association.

After snorkelling in a UNESCO-protected marine park off the coast of Panama, transit the Panama Canal with a stop at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute.

#### A small ship with upmarket comforts

Think of the 148-passenger Wind Star as a hybrid that leans more toward cruise ship than sailboat. The largest vessel regularly plying Costa Rica, the Windstar Cruises yacht promises the allure of sails without compromising the comforts and fine cuisine of an upmarket cruise ship.

Wind Star's sails are not mere decoration, however. "She's actually a better sailing ship than a motor ship," the captain tells me. "I've had her up to 15 knots (under sail)."

There's no hauling of ropes or leaning decks here. A push of a button unfurls 2,200 square metres of sail on four masts in two minutes flat. Computers transfer tons of ballast to keep the ship at a heel of less than two degrees. A sports deck unfolds from the stern to launch the ship's water toys.

Windstar draws people of all ages (though children under eight are not permitted), and it's popular with honeymooners and others celebrating special occasions.

Ashore, passengers can trek through the jungle with naturalist guides in Corcovado and Manuel Antonio national parks, snorkel or look for whales and dolphins at Panama's Coiba National Park, kayak through mangroves, enjoy a beach barbecue and transit the Panama Canal. Foodies will appreciate Wind Star's partnership with the James Beard Foundation and on-board culinary demonstrations.

GLEN PETRIE TRAVELLED AS A GUEST OF WINDSTAR CRUISES, WHICH DID NOT REVIEW OR APPROVE THIS ARTICLE.