



Tall stories

A tall-ship sailing is an ideal way to soak up the wildlife wonderland that is Costa Rica, writes **Jeannine Williamson**

The bowsprit net on *Star Clipper*

PICTURE: Star Clippers

I stretch my foot out tentatively and try to get my balance on the springy net, hanging like a large-weave hammock over the azure blue sea scudding below. After a somewhat inelegant landing, I sit down and crawl further towards the top of the bowsprit, the long pole extending from the front of *Star Clipper*.

Minutes later there's an excited cry from the deck and passengers point in my direction. Thankfully, it's not due to my ungainly antics. I turn my head and see three dolphins create a perfect arc almost next to me. They dive down again, their sleek silhouettes visible beneath the glassy water, and then resurface ➤

TRIED
&
TESTED

STAR CLIPPER Star Clippers

The 170-passenger *Star Clipper* is a modern-day recreation of the 19th-century classic tall ships that once dominated the world's oceans. This fully crewed four-masted vessel, which launched in 1992, has rigging rising 206 feet above deck. It's an unforgettable moment when the billowing sails are unfurled for the first time against the stirring backdrop of the line's sailaway music, *Conquest of Paradise*, by Vangelis.

With Star Clippers, the journey is as much a part of the experience as the destination, and the ship will appeal to clients who are relatively mobile (there is no lift) and looking for a cruise with a difference.

This is not a vessel with Broadway-style entertainment and gourmet restaurants. Activities are low-key and mostly based around maritime traditions such as knot tying, talks from the captain and crew, and star-gazing sessions. Anyone plucking up the courage to climb the rigging to the crow's nest will be rewarded with expansive views of the seascape and teak decks below. Meals are served in one main restaurant – preceded by an evening bell and the eagerly awaited call of 'dinner time' – and with the occasional alfresco buffet. A daily highlight is the expansive cocktail hour canapes served in the convivial outdoor Tropical Bar. Cabins, with traditional portholes and no balconies, are on the small side, but this hardly matters when most time is spent out on deck or on excursions.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Sloth in Manuel Antonio National Park; snorkelling; dolphins PICTURES: Star Clippers



to playfully criss-cross the path of the ship.

The marine display – an almost daily occurrence for those lucky to be out on deck at the right time – is one of many unforgettable experiences in a week that's big on wildlife and natural wonders.

SIMPLE PLEASURES

According to the Happy Planet Index, Costa Rica is officially the happiest place on the planet and I'm not surprised. Everywhere you go, you'll see and hear the words *pura vida*, the national motto which translates as the pure life, or simple life.

This ethos is also a perfect way to sum up life on *Star Clipper*, one of the namesake line's three tall ships, where life aboard is a far cry from fancy entertainment and man-made attractions on mega-cruise ships.

Here, the undemanding pleasure of lounging in the bowsprit net becomes one of my favourite pursuits, and if you want an adrenaline rush you can climb the mast. For more relaxing pastimes, clients can also join a themed yoga sailing.

Star Clippers recently returned to Central America for the first time in almost a decade, offering brand-new itineraries in Costa Rica

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and Nicaragua as well as Panama and its famed canal. I'm on the round-trip sailing from Puntarenas along the Pacific coast to Panama.

The itinerary provides an enthralling taste of this tiny country – five times smaller than the UK – that's conversely one of the largest in terms biodiversity, with around half a million wildlife species.

PARK LIFE

Our first port of call is Quepos, home to Manuel Antonio National Park. Considered a jewel among the country's national parks, its white-sand beaches are flanked by the dense rainforest that's home to three-toed sloths, endangered white-faced capuchin monkeys and hundreds of bird species.

Of course, sightings are never certain, but any wildlife encounter is a thrill and just ➤

DESTINATIONS

CRUISE | COSTA RICA

ASK THE expert



Clare Dudley,
managing director,
Ponders Travel

“Star Clippers and Costa Rica are a wonderful combination. I hosted 37 clients on this itinerary and it was the trip of a lifetime. Sailing through nature on a daily basis, on the most magnificent tall ship, is an experience I would highly recommend. Costa Rica does not have the best roads, so to access some of the country via a cruise is great. Whether you are looking for deserted beaches; woodland walks that are full of tropical birds, insects and animals; towns that are colourful and buzzing with local life; or you just want to enjoy the sunshine aboard your wonderful ship, look no further than Star Clippers. This really is the best and most effective way to see a country that is often described as stepping into your own David Attenborough film set.”

BOOK IT

Star Clippers' Star Clipper sails in Central America from December to March. The seven-night round-trip Costa Rica & Panama sailing, departing on January 11, 2025, leads in at £1,548 cruise-only, including a 10% early-booking discount valid until April 30. starclippers.co.uk



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Animal rescue centre at Natuwa Wildlife Sanctuary; Jeannine Williamson; *Star Clipper* at sunset in Costa Rica **PICTURES:** Rodolfo; Holger Leue



walking through the jungle environment is exciting. I added a pre-cruise stay to my itinerary and visited Natuwa Wildlife Sanctuary, near Puntarenas, where you are guaranteed close-up views of sloths, macaws, monkeys and big cats. Many are rescued from the illegal pet trade and rehabilitated in natural surroundings and, if possible, released back into the wild.

WILD THING

Along with beach stops included in the fare, Star Clippers offers optional excursions to maximise wildlife-spotting opportunities. I book a raft trip on the Savegre River, a short drive from Quepos, and the exhilarating adventure is a highlight of the week that's worth the €100 cost.

Wedged into a robust rubber dinghy, and instructed when and where to paddle by our guide, we gasp as we're alternately drenched by rapids before drawing breath as we float through tranquil stretches under the watchful eye of egrets and herons lining the banks. We scramble up the sand afterwards and tuck into refreshing watermelon and pineapple handed out by our hosts.

Equally memorable are days simply doing not very much at all. We cross into Panamanian waters and stop at Coiba Island. The idyllic setting belies its dark past as a remote penal colony for dangerous prisoners.

As the island was so difficult to reach (and escape from) it allowed nature to thrive. Today, the

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idyllic palm-fringed shores are the perfect place to while away the morning and I'm captivated by tiny hermit crabs bustling around by the shoreline.

Golfo de Chiriqui, another national park, makes for a similarly delightful stop, and on the way back to Puntarenas we take a dip in the balmy waters at *Islas Tortuga*, known as *Turtle Island* because of its rugged volcanic rock formations that resemble the sea creatures.

We reach the various beaches by tender, leaving *Star Clipper* moored majestically in the background. Accompanying us are enthusiastic members of the ship's sports team who bring over snorkels, kayaks, paddleboards and dinghies for anyone feeling energetic.

On the final evening I stay out late on deck and gaze up into the star-filled sky. With the warm breeze in my face, as *Star Clipper* sails on through the night, it's an opportunity to get my last fill of Costa Rica's contagious *pura vida*. **TW**