

A Tour of Costa Rica's Cloud Forests in Monteverde

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This is the second part of our series on the [Rainforest Alliance](#)'s work in sustainable tourism. Today we move onto the Northern Plains region of [Costa Rica](#), this time introducing the beautiful cloud forests of Monteverde and some of the wonderful [Rainforest Alliance Verified](#) accommodations in the area.



Monteverde is one of the most popular tourism destinations in Costa Rica. The abundance of lush green mountains and the mysterious cloud forests which boast an impressive variety of flora and fauna - such as the elusive resplendent quetzal - have contributed to its reputation as the "green jewel of Costa Rica". A visit to Monteverde seems like a visit to nature's playground - not only is the ecosystem home to more than 2,500 plants, and countless mammals and insects, there are a multitude of ways to explore this green world: canopy tours give you an exciting view of the rainforest from above, hanging bridges allow a slower immersion in the forest, numerous nature trails offer independent or guided tours, or for a completely different experience, the skytram offers comfortable guided tours. Bird-watchers find a true paradise here, with more than 400 different species and a chance to these the beautiful and elusive resplendent quetzal. Other exciting activities include night tours of the cloud forest, tours of a cheese factory or coffee farm, horseback riding, biking, or a visit to one of the many butterfly and frog exhibitions in the area.

[SustainableTrip.org](#) features several hotels in Monteverde that are working hard to conserve natural resources and support the local community:



Hotel Belmar

Nestled in the mountains of Monteverde, this cloud forest hotel is not only Rainforest Alliance Verified, it also earned 4 out of 5 sustainability leaves from the Costa Rican Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) program. Sustainability is a key aspect of the hotel's philosophy; for example, **skylights** provide natural lighting in the hotel during daytime and energy-saving fluorescent lights have been installed in 90% of the hotel. Moreover, biodegradable paints and cleaning materials are used around the entire hotel, the garden is maintained naturally without agrochemicals, and the food is mainly organic and locally-sourced. Hotel Belmar also treats its wastewater with a biodigester to produce bio-gas, which is used as energy to warm the Jacuzzi. A stay at Belmar inspires guests to not only live sustainability while on vacation, but to take a sustainable approach to life home with them.



Hotel Heliconia

Located near the Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve and the Santa Elena Rain Forest Reserve, this beautiful hotel integrates sustainability throughout all of its operations. Staff at the reception desk makes informational signs for guest rooms and explain the hotel's sustainability program to guests during check-in. The purchasing department ensures that all products acquired are biodegradable. Hotel maintenance staff contribute by building separate recycling waste containers to be placed in all common areas of the hotel. Moreover, the hotel has purchased a farm, called Heliconia Rancho Cabecerasm, where dairy products, pork, and poultry are produced. In addition, an earthworm organic compost system has been installed as well as a biodigester to produce methane gas to be used as fuel.



Hotel El Establo

Located in the heart of Monteverde's main tourism area, this hotel is a converted cattle ranch that implements modern day technology to ensure high-level sustainability and engages staff as well as guests in achieving this goal. More than 80 percent of the property is covered with forests, and the hotel has technologically advanced water treatment plans and a highly efficient computerized system to manage energy use

The **Rainforest Alliance** is currently working on a sustainable tourism development project with the Monteverde Chamber of Tourism, sponsored by the **CRUSA** Foundation that provides four hotels and a local tour operator with the technical skills they need to earn Rainforest Alliance Verification. Robert Bailes, a consultant working on the project, explained to us that Monteverde is a unique and important location for sustainable tourism. With 50,000 hectares of cloud forest, it is the biggest and oldest private reserve in Costa Rica and receives between 200-250,000 tourists annually - a significant number, considering that the area is home to only 6,500 permanent residents. According to Bailes, the importance of Monteverde as a sustainable tourism destination has raised local environmental awareness and has motivated the participation of local tourism businesses. The Rainforest Alliance will evaluate participating hotels in mid-July, and will help contribute to the sustainable tourism development of Costa Rica's "green jewel".