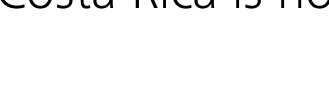
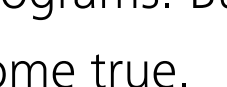


Animals, fauna, landscapes and light – Costa Rica is a photographer's dream destination

The colors of an amazing country

© Stefan Tschumi, SONY ILCE-9, ZEISS Batis 2.8/135, f/6.3, 1/125 sec., ISO 1250

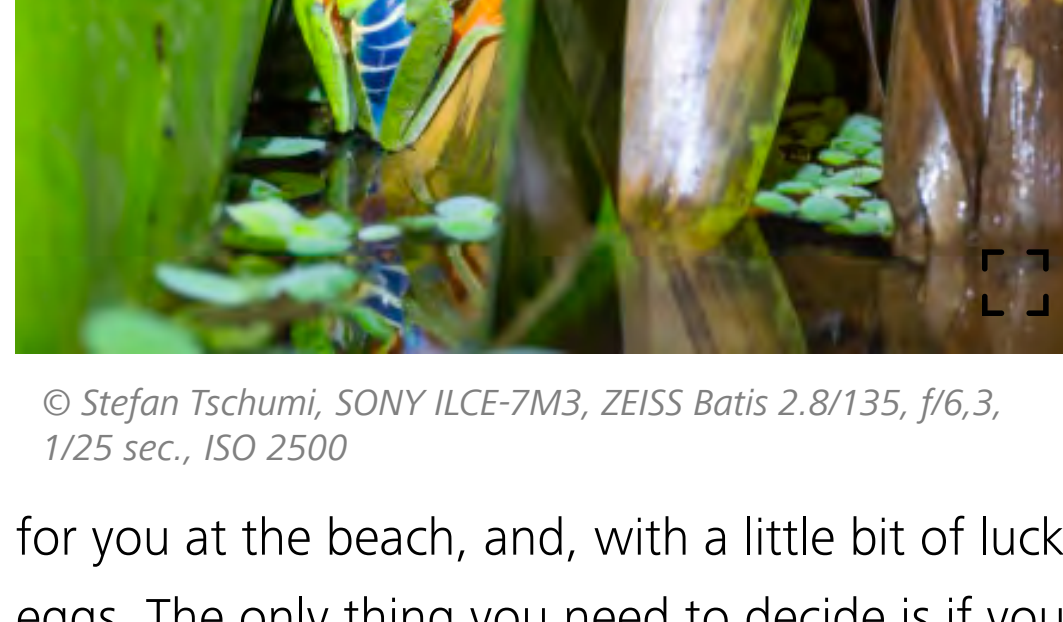
Mar 9, 2020



Costa Rica is undoubtedly a country which is seen as trendy by many at the moment. A lot of people travel to Costa Rica because the country is investing heavily in eco-friendly tourism such as eco-lodges and sustainability programs. But Costa Rica is not just an amazing travel destination, it's also a photographer's dream come true.

At the end of 2018, I was sitting at home asking myself: "What ingredients make a perfect photographic recipe?" The answer to that question is relatively easy – the spices. If curry, turmeric, salt and pepper are the spices that make a great dish, then volcanos, vast landscapes, jungles, wild animals and beautiful light are the ingredients that make a great photograph. So to find and combine these perfect photographic ingredients, I decided to head over the Atlantic Ocean to the small country in the heart of Central America; Costa Rica.

Small, but as diverse as a whole continent



© Stefan Tschumi, SONY ILCE-7M3, ZEISS Batis 2.8/135, f/6.3, 1/25 sec., ISO 2500

Despite its small size, which is shaped like a sea horse, Costa Rica offers everything a photographer can dream of; around 50% of the country is covered by forests and 30% of the countryside is protected. In a country which is comparable to Switzerland in size, you can find active volcanos as well as dense jungles with wild animals such as wildcats, howler monkeys, toucans and sloths. Almost every day, there is a beautiful sunset waiting for you at the beach, and, with a little bit of luck, you might get to watch turtles burying their eggs. The only thing you need to decide is if you want to experience everything on Costa Rica's Pacific or Caribbean coasts.

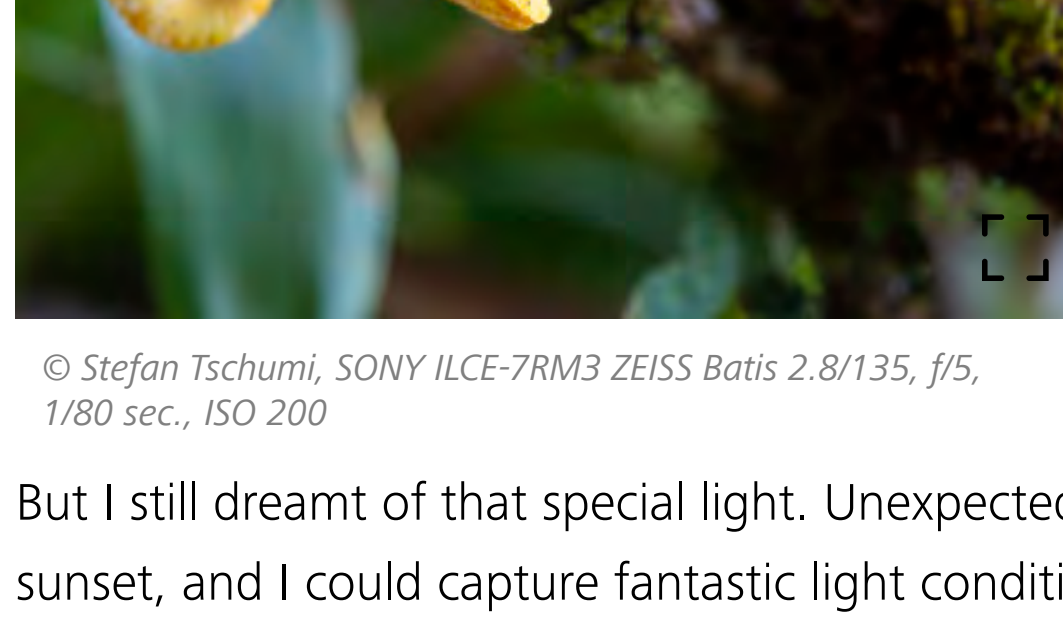
The most popular time of the year to travel to Costa Rica is December to April as the weather is more predictable during these months; expect a lot of sunshine and almost no rain. To be honest, if I wanted to travel around the country, I would have chosen this time too. But a clear blue sky is not the type of thing that gets my heart beating faster. What's really appealing to me is thinking about white and grey clouds, changing weather and the light right before and after a thunderstorm. So I decided to take a chance and travel to Costa Rica in August, right in the middle of the rainy season.

Wet and ever-changing weather

Before my visit, I had taken pictures in many different weather conditions; hot and sandy weather in Namibia, rough conditions with stiff winds near the Scottish coastline and freezing cold in snowy Switzerland to name a few. And then there was also that time in Bali during the monsoon season – challenging for the equipment, but no comparison to Costa Rica in the rainy season.

The fact that there will almost certainly be rain every day makes it hard to plan pictures and requires a lot of flexibility. Sometimes you plan to shoot a location at sunrise, but the weather is just so bad that you can't see anything. So, you need to come up with a Plan B. But that is the reason why I love landscape photography so much – you simply cannot plan each and every detail, you just need to work with what nature gives you.

The challenge for a landscape photographer in the rainy season



© Stefan Tschumi, SONY ILCE-7RM3 ZEISS Batis 2.8/135, f/5, 1/80 sec., ISO 200

During the Golden Hour, our planet is covered in the most beautiful light; a soft, golden light. Unfortunately, due to the rain in Costa Rica, these beautiful moments were usually hidden by the clouds. Nevertheless, I shot in these conditions and produced some nice moody images. The grey colors in combination with the pure green is very special.

But I still dreamt of that special light. Unexpectedly, the weather changed a few minutes before sunset, and I could capture fantastic light conditions at the beach. It was simply spectacular. As expected, the mix of clouds and the soft golden color of the light turned out to be remarkable. In such a situation, I am grateful to be able to shoot with lenses which provide precise control over lens flares. Struggling with lens flares while shooting against the sun is quite common and they can really ruin your compositions. That's why I trust in high-end lenses. Whenever I travel to capture landscapes, the Batis 18mm is one of my favorite lenses to take. If I want to get some close-ups, I go for a Batis 135mm. Particularly in the jungle, it was a huge pleasure to play with the sun using the Batis lenses in combination with my Sony Alpha cameras.

Shooting day and night

I expected a lot of Costa Rica, but I didn't think about nighttime in the jungle. However, it's the perfect time to capture animals that are not active during the day, such as the tarantula or the red-eyed leaf frog, which is probably the most iconic frog on the planet. As soon as the sun sets, you can find these animals and, of course, you want to capture them. As it's difficult to run around in the jungle with a tripod, I decided to leave it at the hotel most of the time and rely on the combination of a wide-open aperture and a pretty good image sensor, which allows me to work with a higher ISO than normal. By using a small external light, the shoot became great fun. Using all these settings, I finally nailed it and an image of a red-eyed tree frog is now in my portfolio.

Costa Rica's colors and fauna



//1 © Stefan Tschumi, SONY ILCE-7M3, ZEISS Batis 2.8/135, f/4, 1/100 sec., ISO 1250 //2 © Stefan Tschumi, SONY ILCE-7RM3 ZEISS Batis 2.8/135, f/5, 6, 1/80 sec., ISO 320 //3 © Stefan Tschumi, SONY ILCE-7RM3 ZEISS Batis 2.8/135, f/5, 6, 1/80 sec., ISO 160

If you talk to people about Costa Rica and ask them which color they have in mind while thinking about the country, they say green. That's no surprise, as green is the dominant color in Costa Rica. But for me, Costa Rica has more colors than that – yellow and orange for example, in all their variations. What I mean here are the colors of frogs and snakes, in particular vipers, some of which can only be found in Costa Rica.

The Arenal volcano is a great place to go if you are looking for snakes. Even though they are not particularly dangerous, as they are not very aggressive, you must keep in mind that these animals are highly venomous. So you should always behave respectfully and keep an appropriate distance. I therefore decided to work with the Batis 135mm lens during the snake shoot. This lens allows me to not disturb the animal too much but still get close enough to take some really nice pictures. To capture all the fascinating details of the snake, a high-resolution sensor and a sharp lens are helpful. Snakes are majestic animals – unbelievably detailed eyes, sleek skin and wonderful colors.

In addition to all the snakes and frogs, iguanas and sloths are very popular. One day we passed through Filadelfia, a small city in Guanacaste province. Many iguanas live in a park in the middle of the city. The chances of getting an amazing picture of them are very high as they leave the trees and explore the ground from time to time. Sloths can also be found in many places, but since they have perfect camouflage, they are hard to spot. Nevertheless, once you find one, you'll have a lot of time to capture it as sloths are famous for being the slowest mammal on earth. They are so slow, they even sometimes get covered in moss.

Deciding on equipment

At the start of every photography trip, I think about the equipment I should bring along with me. Since I always want to be prepared for almost every situation, at least in theory, I take three different cameras with me;

- the Sony Alpha 7RIII, which I mainly use for landscape pictures,
- the Sony Alpha A9, for situations requiring rapid, rock solid autofocus capabilities (e.g. taking pictures of wild animals in the jungle), and
- the Alpha 7III, as a film camera.

Furthermore, I choose several different lenses;

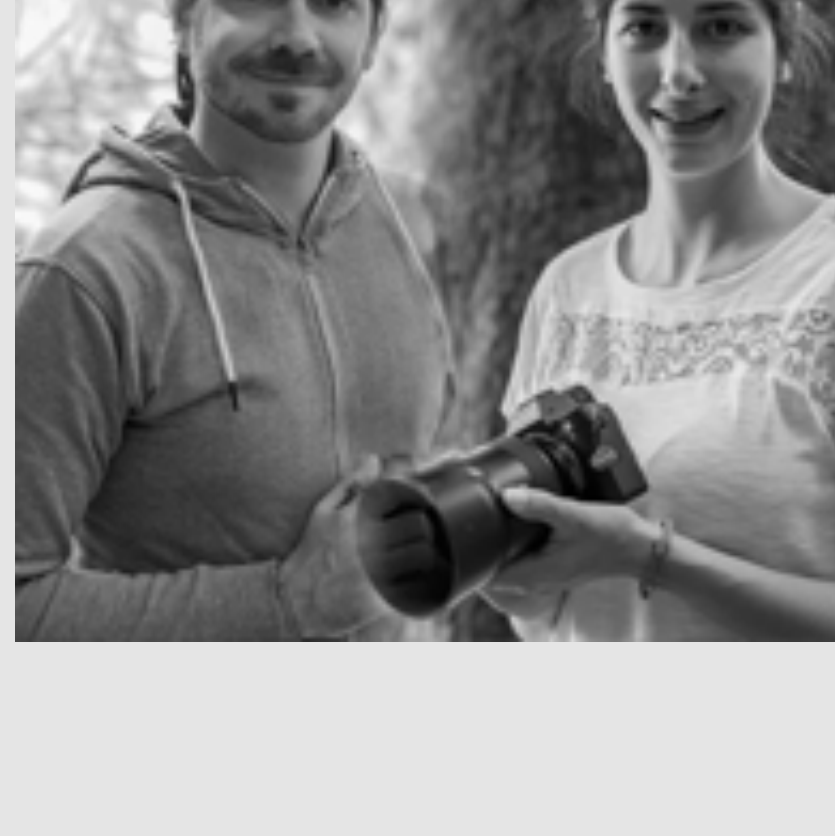
- the ZEISS Batis 18mm, for landscape and nature, as well as urban, pictures
- the ZEISS Batis 85mm, which is my favorite portrait lens, and
- the ZEISS Batis 135mm, for any situation where more focal length is required.

I complete my selection with a 55mm 1.8 Sony lens with ZEISS glass and a 150-600mm lens. This is quite a big selection and the reason for that is simple; as I don't want to change lenses when I'm out in the rain, I decide on two lenses and two cameras each day. As a result, I really try to anticipate what each day could bring. But honestly, you'll never be prepared for every situation – and that makes photography really special.

As I worked with ZEISS lenses several times before and I used them in harsh conditions in Scotland and Bali, I expected nothing else than a rock-solid performance. And that is exactly what I got.

Always have your camera with you

Photographically, Costa Rica was a big surprise for me. I am still blown away by the diversity this small country offers. There is so much to see, so many things to discover and the next photo opportunity could be just around the corner. Seriously, you never know what to expect. Of course, you can read a lot about different places to go but honestly, just be prepared at any time. Costa Rica is still wild; there could be a monkey tamed or you suddenly spot a beautiful toucan. Nature grows organically and is not visibly tamed so all of a sudden, you can discover a river which is perfect for a long exposure. For this reason, I highly recommend having the camera right next to you at all times.



The author

Stefan Tschumi and Stephanie Bernhard

Stefan Tschumi

I look at photography as something that is bigger than the photographer itself. Therefore, I love to be out in nature with my camera, always in the hunt for the perfect light situation with the goal, to combine them with remarkable landscapes. Out of this mix I want to create something that I call poetry in pixels. My photographs are not snapshots. There are most of the time planned and shall be a glimpse of a story, a little piece of art.

For me, the camera is a door opener. Sometimes literally spoken, sometimes just to the hearts of the people. It is incredible what can happen, if I just take my camera and go out.

[Website](#) | [Instagram](#)

Stephanie Bernhard

Photography is a great tool to show and share what I see while being out in nature. It is like cutting out a small little piece of the world and show its beauty. Furthermore, it is a fantastic connector, because photography is kind of an own language. A language which can be understood by people no matter what their mother tongue is. Thanks to this beautiful art form, stories can be shared in the most beautiful way. For me, photography comes almost every time in connection with an adventure, nature and amazing people and it enriches my life in a very special way.

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