

Butterfly garden adventure by Cyril Brass

No trip to Costa Rica would be complete without a butterfly garden adventure. The creation of a natural tropical setting in a protected environment complete with lush vegetation, flowering plants and beautifully colored butterflies, allows visitors to get close to some of Costa Rica's more delicate wildlife species.

After all, Costa Rica has approximately eighteen percent of the world's twenty thousand butterfly species. The explanation for such an abundance of butterflies in this small Central American country is that the great diversity of tropical habitats is reflected in a wide variety and number of wildlife species, including butterflies. From coastal beaches to forest covered mountains, butterflies can be seen regularly in the wild.

However, visiting a butterfly garden in Costa Rica provides the opportunity for guests to learn more about these amazing winged creatures and to view many of the species up close. The netted enclosure allows the butterflies to fly freely and rest peacefully while the visitors walk amidst the natural habitats of these precious insects. As well, these closely monitored mesh structures prevent outside intruders and predators like birds, lizards, snakes and spiders from preying on the butterflies during all the stages of their development.

The tropical vegetation planted in the gardens determines which butterfly species a visitor will be able to observe, for each specific plant species attracts its own specific butterfly species. This creates a unique experience in each butterfly garden a person visits.

Females return to the same host plants where they were themselves hatched to lay eggs of their own. These host plants become the specific food source for the caterpillars of that particular species. The caterpillars are eating machines, devouring tremendous amounts of vegetation as quickly as possible. By gorging themselves, the caterpillars grow quickly until they enter their pupa (chrysalis) stage of metamorphosis, before finally emerging as a beautiful winged creature.

Most butterfly gardens throughout Costa Rica have live display areas, letting visitors witness the transformation from tiny white eggs to fuzzy caterpillars to hanging pupa to

colourful butterflies.

Also within the mesh covered gardens are colourful flowering plants. These plants provide sweet nectar; nourishment for the adult butterflies to feast on. Fully developed butterflies do not eat the vegetation around them. They can't. They have nothing to chew the plant material with. Instead their mouth consists of a straw-like tube (Proboscis) which is used to suck up the liquid nectar from the flowers.

Ripened fruits like bananas and oranges are sometimes placed on small feeders throughout the garden to provide additional food supply for the adult butterflies.

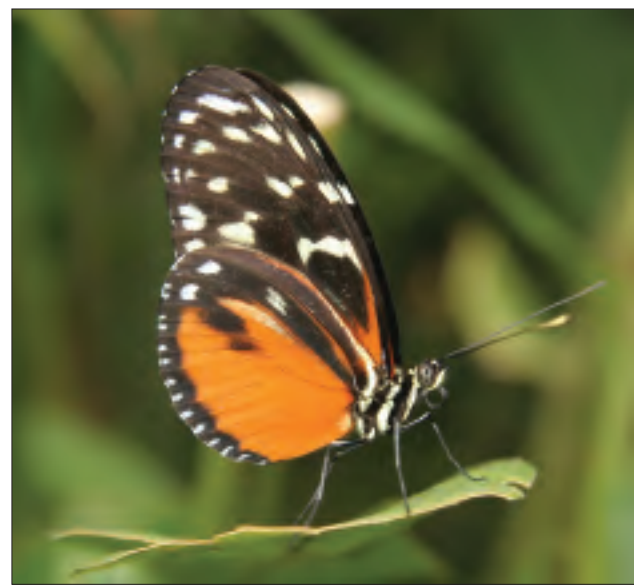
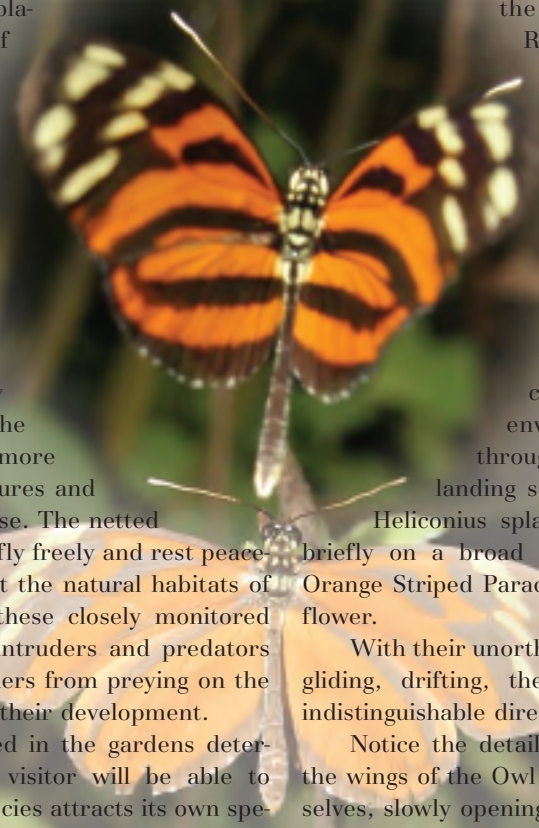
Within the confines of the enclosed garden, butterfly activity is frantic and non-stop. When it rains, the butterflies quickly head for cover; but on bright sunny hot days, watch the butterflies in their carefree travel around their protected environment. Swallowtails floating through intertwined branches and vines, landing softly on flower petals. Black Winged Heliconius splashed with red and yellow, stopping briefly on a broad leaf before heading off once more. Orange Striped Paracaidas hovering over a sweet smelling flower.

With their unorthodox movements of swirling, dipping, gliding, drifting, they appear to be dancing about in indistinguishable directions.

Notice the detailed intricate designs and patterns on the wings of the Owl Butterfly, as they rest, fanning themselves, slowly opening and closing their wings. Identify the striking Blue Morpho with its brilliant metallic blue tones against a backdrop of rainforest greenery. Look high and low on branches, under hanging leaves and on the ground. They are everywhere.

Wander slowly and quietly along the groomed pathways. Enjoy the interaction with the butterflies as they fly towards you, above you, around you, maybe even land on you. On several visits to the butterfly gardens in Costa Rica, several butterflies have briefly landed on my arm, foot and top of my head.

Depending on the time of the year the number of butterflies varies. The best time, between June and November, coincides with the rainy season. But in a more controlled environment like the mesh covered butterfly gardens



many species can be seen at any time of the year. While in Costa Rica, whether you are looking for a rewarding discovery as an amateur lepidopterist or as a nature lover, seeking a peaceful relaxing experience in a tropical oasis, I highly recommend a butterfly garden adventure. [ca](#)

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