

*Casa Las Olas, the six-bedroom residence at  
Four Seasons Resort, Peninsula Papagayo,  
overlooks Costa Rica's Prieta Bay.*

# Good

*A single trip through Costa Rica can move through landscapes so distinct they feel like*

# Natured

*different planets—each a different take on pura vida, each more extraordinary than the last.*

## THE HARDEST THING ABOUT COSTA RICA ISN'T GETTING THERE.

It's choosing where to go. In a country smaller than many U.S. states, volcanic hot springs give way to Pacific surf, cloud forest canopy to Caribbean coral reefs—all underpinned by a biodiversity so remarkable that more than a quarter of the land has been set aside to protect it. The phrase “pura vida” travels across every region. It's often invoked as a greeting or an expression of gratitude, but it's also a gentle reminder that no matter which path you choose, the only wrong move here is to rush the journey.



Meals at Ámbar, the treetop restaurant at Nekajui Peninsula Papagayo, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, are most magical at sunset.

## THE PACIFIC COAST

*Along Costa Rica's northern Pacific shore, secluded coves and lush, jungle-covered hills create the backdrop for a nature-infused beach escape. Calm surf invites snorkeling and paddle-boarding, while world-class swells lure surfers and fiery sunsets rival those anywhere on the planet.*

### Papagayo Peninsula

Even in a country defined by wild beauty, there's room for a bit of polish. A 1,400-acre isthmus of white sand beach and tropical dry forest, this exclusive resort enclave was designed for nature lovers and has set the standard for Costa Rica's signature brand of barefoot luxury for nearly two decades.

Overlooking Playa Pochote, the luxurious **Nekajui, Ritz-Carlton Reserve** debuted in February 2025 as the brand's first foray into Central and South America. A central lodge anchors the property, while 107 guest rooms, suites, and villas—including a trio of lavish treetop tents—exude a sleek, jungle-meets-ocean aesthetic.

Tee off at the Arnold Palmer-designed **Ocean Course**, where nine miles of fairways are linked by leafy paths. Each hole has its own character, and traversing the course feels a bit like a safari, with play unfolding amid a soundtrack of parrots and howler monkeys.

**The Explorers** offers adventures throughout the resort's 250-acre **Palmares Preserve**. One favorite has guests paddling an outrigger canoe through the peninsula's wild-life-rich, mangrove-studded waterways. The outrigger is also available for ocean excursions, including

*You'll likely hear the distinctive calls of howler monkeys ring through the cloud forests of Monteverde long before you spot them.*



snorkeling in the warm turquoise waters of Bahía Culebra.

### Nicoya Peninsula

One of the world's five Blue Zones—regions where people live exceptionally long, healthy lives—the Nicoya Peninsula embodies a lifestyle rooted in sunshine, community, and that *pura vida* spirit. Laid-back and effortlessly hip, Santa Teresa makes an attractive home base.

For a genuine toes-in-the-sand experience, check into **Hotel Nantipa**—a collection of 29 airy suites, bungalows, and villas tucked into a jungle-like landscape along one of the country's best-loved surfing beaches.

Days here revolve around the sea—and as one of Costa Rica's premier surf destinations, it's an ideal place to learn. Beginner-friendly breaks roll in at **Playa Hermosa** and **Playa Carmen**, while **Playa Santa Teresa**'s more powerful waves are better suited to experienced surfers.

Or if you'd prefer to be *on* the water

*Miles of dense jungle flank the black-sand beaches along Costa Rica's Caribbean coast.*



instead of *in* the water, head south to Malpaís for a fishing excursion in the **Cabo Blanco Nature Reserve**. The warm blue waters nurture an abundance of amberjack, mahi mahi, grouper, and yellowfin—all of which you can bring back to Nantipa for a post-adventure, ocean-to-table meal.

## THE FORESTED INTERIOR

*Inland Costa Rica reveals a landscape rich with volcanoes, waterfalls, and mystical jungles. Within a few hours' drive, you can travel from tropical dry forest to thriving rainforest to misty cloud forest, letting you explore three distinct ecosystems in a single trip.*

### Río Perdido

Less than an hour from Liberia's International Airport lies a hidden pocket of tropical dry forest shaped by volcanic canyons, geothermal energy, and the “lost river” that winds through its landscape.

Set on a bluff above a pair of serpentine canyons, —>

PHOTOS, THIS PAGE, LEFT TO RIGHT: TRAIL/UNSPASH; FILIZ ELAERTS/UNSPASH; OPPOSITE PAGE: COURTESY OF NEKAJUI, A RITZ-CARLTON RESERVE

**Río Perdido Hotel & Thermal River** is a tranquil, architecturally stunning oasis. Thirty-eight bungalows linked by forested pathways feature comforts like elevated terraces, hammocks, and open-air showers intended to foster harmony with the landscape. Devoted mountain bikers call the region “South Moab,” owing to 16 miles of volcanic singletrack where solid rock replaces the jungle mud typical of most Costa Rican trails.

The property’s 1,500-acre private forest reserve is a playground for discovery and wellness. Elevate your yoga practice in the treetop yoga shala, float in Río Perdido’s warm, mineral-rich pools, or hike the **Mesa Norte trail** for a dazzling view of the Miravalles, Rincón de la Vieja, and Tenorio—the region’s triffecta of volcanoes. Evenings bring forest walks and astronomer-led stargazing excursions.

**Arenal**

Dominated by the imposing cone



*Situated within Tenorio Volcano National Park, the Río Celeste waterfall appears a milky shade of turquoise thanks to volcanic minerals.*

of Arenal Volcano, Costa Rica’s self-proclaimed adventure capital is lush, dramatic, and full of wildlife. Though the volcano is currently in a resting phase, its activity heats underground springs, making this geological hotspot one of the country’s most enticing landscapes.

You’d be hard-pressed to find a rainforest retreat as sublime as **Nayara Tented Camp**. The property’s luxurious, safari-style tents are built right into the hills, each with its own clawfoot tub, thermal plunge pool, and terrace with captivating volcano views.

Climb aboard a pontoon boat and set out along Río Frio for a naturalist-led trek into **Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge**, a remote area of wetland and rainforest that serves as protected habitat for iguanas, crocodiles, sloths, monkeys, ocelots, and countless bird species.

A hike on **Sendero las Coladas** winds through dense, secondary rainforest, where massive ceiba and ficus trees are draped with smaller



*Guests at Hotel Belmar are immersed in the dense cloud-forest canopy, even from their room’s soaking tub.*

plants and vines. The trail climbs a section of hardened lava flow to a lookout that offers sweeping views of Arenal Lake and the iconic stratovolcano.

**Monteverde**

A cooler, greener counterpoint to the coast, Monteverde pulses with an ever-present sense of the wild. Biologists have been drawn to the region’s ethereal cloud forest since the 1970s, but today it’s best known for thrilling zipline adventures and remarkable biodiversity.

Family-owned **Hotel Belmar** opened in 1985 as one of Costa Rica’s flagship eco-resorts and remains deeply committed to sustainability. The 26 rooms feature amber-hued wood paneling and soaking tubs, while the on-site restaurant, Celajes, follows a regenerative farm-to-table-to-farm model: Ingredients are grown organically on the family farm or locally sourced, and all food waste is collected for animal feed or compost.

Ascend into the trees at **Savia Forest Immersion**, a 17-acre private reserve, where canopy experiences introduce visitors to a dazzling array of flora and fauna—from bromeliads and orchids, to monkeys, butterflies, and even the elusive quetzal.

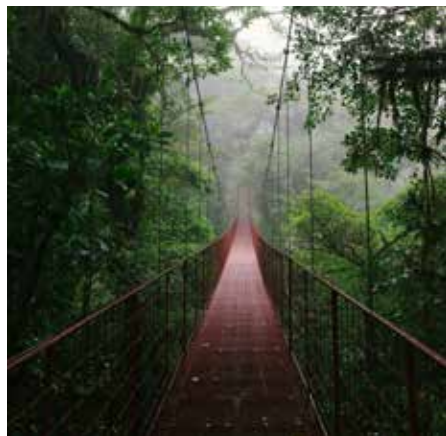
For a more grounded perspective, set out on horseback through the countryside surrounding **Finca Madre Tierra**. The carbon-neutral farm also offers hands-on activities in sustainable agriculture, including sugarcane pressing, coffee bean harvesting, and cheese tasting. ➔

PHOTOS, THIS PAGE, LEFT TO RIGHT: UNSPLASH; COURTESY OF HOTEL BELMAR; OPPOSITE PAGE: COURTESY OF NAYARA TENTED CAMP



*At Nayara Tented Camp, a Grand Tent gives families their own private corner of the Costa Rican rainforest, complete with a plunge pool and firepit.*

Sloths might be the animal species most associated with Costa Rica, but more than 900 bird species also call the country home.



## THE CARIBBEAN COAST AND PACUARE RIVER

With its lush rainforest, rustic coast, and Afro-Caribbean culture, Costa Rica's eastern shore pulses to a rhythm of its own. Palm-fringed roads wind through beachy villages where calypso spills from open-air restaurants, giving way to remote rivers and dense jungle.

Just steps from the sea in the buzzy surf town of **Puerto Viejo de Talamanca**, the art-filled **Hotel Aguas Claras** channels the region's Caribbean character through both its aesthetic and its cuisine. Fifteen colorful bungalows and suites sit amid tropical gardens where you're just as likely to spot a sloth or a toucan as you are a fellow guest.

The Caribbean coast has been home to the indigenous **BriBri community** for millennia. During a guided tour of their ancestral farm, you'll learn how the cacao plant is cultivated and watch the process of making chocolate from bean to bar—an important task carried out by the

Constructed from locally sourced stone and wood, **Nekajui** was designed to blend into its cliffside perch.



women in this matrilineal society.

A short drive north from Puerto Viejo de Talamanca, you'll find Costa Rica's largest living coral reef system beneath the protected waters of **Cahuita National Park**. Dive in on a snorkeling tour. A scenic boat ride brings you to Punta Cahuita, where the sea is alive with sea turtles, sting-rays, reef sharks, sponges, lobsters, and more than 30 species of coral.

### Pacuare

Widely considered the most scenic white-water adventure in the world, a trip on the **Pacuare River** is a thrill for rafting enthusiasts and novices alike. The scenery is otherworldly: dramatic, moss-covered cliffs and towering ceiba trees line both sides of the river, while exhilarating Class II and III rapids carry you through this verdant sanctuary, home to a menagerie of tropical wildlife.

The journey ends at **Pacuare Lodge**, a luxurious wind-powered hideaway that rises above the riverbank surrounded by 2,500 acres

of lush primary rainforest. Twenty suites nestle deep in the canopy, their rich wood interiors opening onto spacious terraces above the forest floor. Several are accessible only by bridges suspended over the gorge.

Set aside time to hike through the forest to **El Tesorito Creek** for a canyoning adventure, zip through the canopy to The Nest, a treetop platform where lunch awaits, or trek **Sendero de las Mulas** (the Mule Trail) to swim in a series of waterfalls.

### THE OSA PENINSULA

*Remote and rugged, Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula lures the kind of traveler who measures a trip by the wildlife spotted and the trails logged.*

Anchored by Corcovado National Park, the region teems with an estimated 2.5% of the earth's biodiversity. Experience it at **Lapa Rios Lodge**, which sits on 1,000 acres of protected, tropical lowland forest. A maze of elevated walkways winds through the jungle to 17 dreamy open-air suites and villas overlooking the Golfo Dulce, where humpback whales come to breed each fall.

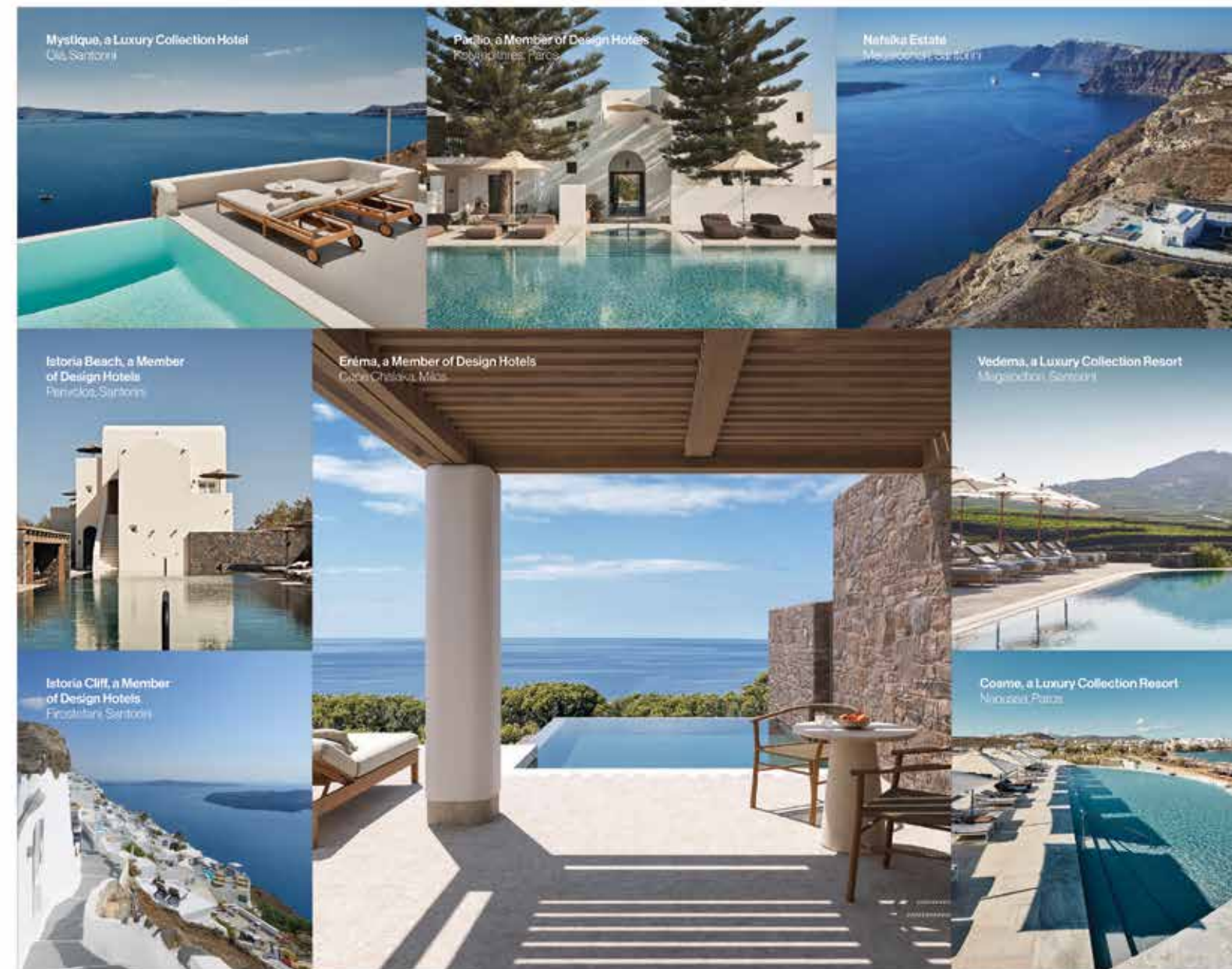
Each evening during dinner, the lodge concierge outlines the next day's activities, led by Lapa Rios' expert naturalist guides. Pull on your wellies, grab your binoculars, and head into the forest. Scout the tidepools on **Matapalo Beach** for starfish, hike the **rainforest ridge trail** to spot white-faced capuchin monkeys, electric green tree boas, and smiling sloths, or set out by boat at dawn to discover **Corcovado's** biological riches. ■

PHOTOS, LEFT TO RIGHT: GIULIA SQUILLACE/UNSPLASH; COURTESY OF NEKAJUI, A RITZ-CARLTON RESERVE

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