

THE TRAVELER

ESCAPE PLAN



Las Brisas pool

PURA VIDA

This Costa Rican paradise focuses on wellness and relaxation.

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Casita Grande outdoor space looking out



Casita Grande with pool

I F YOU'VE DREAMED OF paradise, you've probably dreamed of Costa Rica—Pérez Zeledón, Costa Rica. Recently we ventured to this Central American destination and stayed at the ultra-luxurious Hacienda AltaGracia, deep in the region's natural rainforest.

After our flight out of O'Hare and landing at the airport in San José, we took a short private charter to the resort's airstrip and headed for our casita. Once inside, we marveled the immaculate living space designed by New York-based designer Nina Gotlieb. The casita was designed with a neutral color palette and rich textures of wood, stone, and organic fibers, bringing the area's natural wonders indoors. The property offers 50 spacious one- and two-bedroom casitas on its 180 acres

of property. Each offers stunning views overlooking the lush landscape and rolling hills of the San Isidro Valley.

After taking in our accommodations, we headed for one of the two pools. Laying poolside, we once again had a panoramic view of the valley and mountains while sipping cocktails custom made with locally sourced ingredients. Along with the drinks we tried the fresh-made guacamole and plantain chips—something we would have the opportunity to make with the chef later in the day.

The resort is in the region's cloud forest, rich with plants, trees, and flowers growing wildly, yet beautifully. It also happens to be located next to one of the world's "Blue Zones"—an area where locals tend to live much longer than average—something locals are very proud of.

The next morning, we took advantage of the team's expertise, hiking the mountains with our expert guide, Johan. The morning hike took us to the most picturesque waterfall locations where we snapped photos and tested the crystal-clear water—something we would be fully immersed in the next day.

Johan was incredibly knowledgeable and passionate

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The Well Spa pool

about the landscape—especially the nearly 300 species of birds that crossed our path as we walked the property. We left appreciating nature even more after spending a few hours with him. From there, we continued to the property owner's outdoor home where we sat down for a traditional Costa Rican breakfast—rice, beans, onions, baked cheese, and caramelized plantains—before heading back.

After returning to the resort, we once again took advantage of the infinity pool while snacking on fish tacos and salads, made from the resort's lush garden. Every morsel of food devoured at the holistic paradise was delicious.

Later that evening, we headed for one of the on-site restaurants, Grano, where we indulged in evening festivities with fellow guests and the bartender's specialty cocktail of the day. Dinner at Grano was something worth raving about. The menu, which changes daily, featured unique delicacies with familiar ingredients. It was easy to like everything.

The next day was all about leisure and excitement—something the resort prides itself on. Part of the Hacienda AltaGracia experience is helping guests discover the undiscovered and push themselves just outside of their comfort zone to break new boundaries and encounter both peace and exhilaration. We accomplished just that during our stay.

That afternoon, we were escorted to El Rio for a healing river bath. This immersive experience began with a cleansing of the aura, followed by a natural detoxifying coffee scrub before we were fully submerged in the cold, pure river water. We then headed for the natural river bath—a large bath basin filled with river water and heated for five hours in the morning by a large wood-burning fire. The experience was one-of-a-kind and helped us connect with nature—something that is magical in the rainforest.

Our dinner that evening was a bit different. Our Compa—a dedicated guest liaison and experience de-



Mercado dining lounge

signer—took us to the Picadero for an immersive dinner and traditional stable show. The meal consisted of the best of land and sea—cooked in overdried coconut leaves on an open-fire and paired perfectly with the Tempranillo suggested by our server. Between courses, we enjoyed the lively Costa Rican horse show and got up close with the horses before retreating to our casita.

We continued our adventure with the horses the next morning on a trail ride called *Paso de Los Vaqueros* through the nearby hills. During the two-hour ride, we found ourselves surrounded by majestic mountains and rode both on-trail and off-trail, thanks to our trusty wrangler. We had the unique opportunity to see Capuchin monkeys in the treetops along the ride (and apparently it was the first time the trailhands saw them on the property as well). Before we began our descent, we could see the full valley with cloud covered mountains up high and lower lying areas where our casita was below.

Our guide made sure to point out the property's coffee farm—which boasts more than 7,000 plants—and *Cananga Odorata* (Ylang Ylang) trees—the trees that give Chanel No. 5 its signature scent. If you're looking to learn more about the region's famous coffee, you'll



want to ask your Compa for the Sustainable Coffee Production experience. This tour takes you through local coffee plantation, Los Jilgueros, where you'll see the start-to-finish journey of a deliciously brewed cup of sustainable coffee. The tour is followed by an immersive lesson in various roasts and a tasting, accompanied by a collection of local sweet and savory treats.

Upon opening in November 2021, Hacienda AltaGracia joined forces with New York-based brand, THE WELL, to elevate the spa experience for guests while connecting them with Pachamama—Mother Earth. Before we began our treatments, we immersed ourselves in Casa de Aqua—a glass-walled oasis dedicated to purification and relaxation rituals. Each of THE WELL's time-proven local healing traditions and cutting-edge science offerings include East-meets-West healing therapies, transformative treatments, expert-led health coaching and workshops, and more. We opted for the Advanced Bodywork massage and The Skin Ritual facial treatment. Both treatments left us feeling relaxed and rejuvenated and ready for our next spa experience.

We happened to be visiting while one of THE WELL's Visiting Masters, Darren Austin Hall, a Sound

Healer, Sacred Musician, Spiritual Teacher, and Sage from Toronto, Canada was there. Hall led us through a meditative journey of deep relaxation states through song and use of special instruments. It was the perfect end to our journey at Hacienda AltaGracia, leaving us ready to take on the morning flight home.

Our journey home came too soon, as I could have stayed in Costa Rica forever.

The local way of life and the culture and traditions that our guides and Compa were able to teach us about were fascinating and nice retreat from the hustle and bustle of home. It's no wonder many of the experts at Hacienda AltaGracia have lived in the area their entire life and are passionate about it.

There is a saying you'll hear immediately upon landing in Costa Rica and throughout your trip that embodies the way of life—*Pura Vida*. It translates into "Pure Life," which perfectly captures the spirit of both Hacienda AltaGracia and the region—something you'll miss once you leave.

For more information on Hacienda AltaGracia, visit aubergeresorts.com/altagracia.