

Costa Rica Eco-Luxe

by Gregory P. Gallagher

Exuberant and savory pleasures abound in the tiny Central American Democracy of Costa Rica. So much so that veteran world travelers, who search for a suitable country in which to rest their bones, are often found setting up luxurious homes in this tropical paradise.

The sheer variety of Costa Rica's landscapes from Pacific surfer beaches to volcanic mountains covered with rainforest, to undulating coffee plantations or White Water River valleys, is sure to intrigue even the most jaded globetrotters.

Consider by many the world leader in ecotourism, this tiny democracy has also invented a tangible system for measuring sustainable tourism, specially designed for hotel and resort operators.

The Certificated of Sustainable Tourism (CST) is a no-nonsense set of ecological best practice guidelines, created by the Costa Rica Tourism Institute (ICT) to stem the flood of waste generated by the hotels and resorts throughout the country. The ICT examines resorts and hotel countrywide, determining the level of sustainability and awarding them from one to five "green leaf" icons accordingly. This program has been so successful these few years, that many other countries are studying it carefully for their own needs.

The only two establishments to win five leaf designations are also two of the most luxurious accommodations found in Costa Rica: Lapa Rios Ecolodge located in the wilds of the Osa Peninsula, and Finca Rosa Blanca overlooking the lush Central Valley. Both prove by their eco-concentrated practices that luxury and responsibility can be a successful duet.

Built on a remote private preserve of over 400 hectares (1000 + acres) near the Panamanian border, Lapa Rios is the labor workers, Karen and John Lewis. Opened in 1993, the lodge overlooks the confluence of Golfo Dulce at the Pacific Ocean. The neighborhood includes such once-in-a-lifetime delights as Corcovado National Park, an untamed area National Geographic Magazine refers to as "the most biologically intense place on earth".

Accommodations are chiseled from locally harvested hardwoods, while thatched roofs provide an airy grace. Handcrafted tile coupled with a brilliant color schemes give de décor a sense of vibrancy in keeping with an environment that includes jaguars, blue morpho butterflies and rainbow colored macaws. All rates include taxes and three meals from a hearty, incentive menu of fresh market produce and homegrown treats.

Meanwhile Finca Rosa Blanca offers a grand inland perch overlooking the rainforest and coffee plantations of the Central Valley. Created by Teri and Glenn Jampol, this dynamic environmental couple presents guests with a rare luxury crafted from a recipe of peaceful surroundings, inspired décor and homegrown cuisine.

Finca Rosa Blanca is nestled among ten acres of fruit trees and an explosion of other tropical flora, and recalls the design musings of idiosyncrasy Spanish Architect Antoni Gaudi. Further, it plays with conventional ideas of room shapes and electric materials. The outcome is an spiritual elixir of the highest order, serving up Teri's delicious gastronomic fare against the palette of Glenn's original paintings.

Both of these exiting resorts are imbued with a vision of the future of global ecotourism no matter where it is offered. For travelers looking for remarkable luxury against a backdrop of pristine tropical beauty, contact either of these luxurious Costa Rican locations.