

by Stephanie Schulte

W E C L I M B E D T H R O U G H T H E C A N O P Y



# Costa Ríca

As the flying metal tube holding us zoomed south to Central America, I giddily imagined what awaited us in the land of Pura Vida! Everyone I spoke to about Costa Rica got a little twinkle in their eye and insisted it is a place of magic and big beauty. Of course there are humungous bugs, gargantuan spiders, venomous snakes, panthers, mosquitoes, poisonous frogs and more spiders. I plucked up my courage and plunged head first into the Costa Rican experience.

Our first night we stayed 15 minutes from the airport in a colorful town called Alajuela. The enchanting Pura

Vida Bed and Breakfast welcomed us with open arms and a refreshingly chilled passion fruit smoothie. Lounging on the patio, marveling at the majestic Poas volcano off in the distance sure felt dreamy. We slept like babies to the sound of rain showers, woke up, ate a tasty breakfast served on a lush open air patio, bid farewell to our gracious hosts, hopped a cab and were off to a smaller airport. Does smaller airport mean smaller airplanes? Yes it did! *\*shudder\**

I shored up the airplane; propellers. *Check.* Healthy looking pilot. *Check.* Seatbelts. *Check.* Only 18 seats. *Nervous check.* No cockpit door meant we could see everything the pilots were doing. Gauges and levers and pedals, oh my! Well, all was fine and dandy until I realized we were about to land on an airstrip the size of my street smack dab in the middle of the jungle. The pilot honked the horn to shoo any animals away and let us down softly. I felt like Indi-Anna Schulte.

Giovanni from Playa Nicuesa Rainforest Lodge met us in Golfito, we hopped another cab to



the wharf, and then a panga boat took us thirty minutes up the mesmerizing coastline of the Golfo Dulce to our remote jungle destination.

The small dock extended out to us like a warm handshake ushering us into the wild flourishing paradise. It took a few minutes to adjust and integrate the absolute breathtaking beauty of the environment. Steamy moist air whirled around my body like a warm blanket while towering trees festooned with orchids, epiphytes and bromeliads winked and smiled. Up close and off in the distance creatures called, sang, cackled, croaked, buzzed, howled, chortled and bellowed.

The lodge itself looked like something straight out of Architectural Digest Magazine; glistening wood all around, ceiling fans spinning and cooling, nooks and crannies appointed with hammocks and cozy places to sit and let the jungle songs serenade you. The owners are extremely passionate about Mother Earth and in healing and preserving the natural beauty and resources of the area. They are also committed to running a sustainable lodge in rhythm with nature, which in my opinion is tremendously important. All of the wood used in the construction of the lodge was harvested from trees that had fallen naturally. What a concept!

The food. Ah the food! Ultra fresh and scrumdiddlyumptous. The chef's whistled while they worked their culinary magic in the kitchen whipping up fresh salsas, savory fruit juices, bocadillos, the freshest delectable fish, delirious salads all infused with warmth and love.

The guides are all highly educated on the flora and fauna of the jungle and were delighted to answer all questions.

*"Does the dinner plate sized spider on my shower wall jump or bite hard?"*

*"No, Stephanie, don't worry, that's a wandering spider. Not aggressive at all," Giovanni assured me.*

*"Do the enormous ants parading through our casita sting or attack?"*

*"Just let them pass. They are soldier ants and will be on their way shortly. Don't step in their way and you'll be just fine," Krystn promised me.*

*Gulp.*

We kayaked with gleeful dolphins under the hot tropical sun, hiked through dense green jungles, lazily boated up the Esquinas River, saw colorful fine feathered friends, reptiles, insects, bats, monkey's and all things in between. We also met the nicest most interesting people all the while soaking in Costa Rican jungle life.

With crocodile tears filling my eyes I bid adieu to Playa Nicuesa. The travelling show must go on.



Onward north we went to the Selva Verde Lodge which is nestled against the River Sarapiquí. We arrived, the manager handed us our itinerary and we were zip lining through the jungle canopy within an hour. We flew through tight tree tunnels and whizzed over rushing rivers laughing hysterically the entire zippy time.

Afternoon showers come everyday during rainy season so imagine our delight when halfway through our raging river rafting excursion the skies blew open and started dumping warm tropical rain on us! Of course a trip to Costa Rica wouldn't be complete without horseback riding underneath the monkey laden canopies. We did just that with a ruggedly lovely cowboy named Wilson who comes from a long line of cowboys.

The lodge carried a mellow slow pace vibe which was a welcome respite from our hard charging adventures. The front desk can arrange any and all excursions that are of interest with a quick phone call and you're off!

As I sat in seat 7B staring down at the fleeting Costa Rica landscape twinkles not tears filled my eyes! It's catchy. Go there and see and feel Pura Vida for yourself.

[www.puravidahotel.com](http://www.puravidahotel.com)

[www.nicuesalodge.com](http://www.nicuesalodge.com)

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