



QUICK TRIPS

PURA Vida

Sample both sides of Costa Rica at two resorts on the COAST and in the RAINFOREST

By Mary Murray

In Costa Rica, *pura vida* is not just a saying geared toward tourists. This call to live a “pure life” is intrinsic to the local attitude and sway of the day. Simple pleasures, like a dip in a hot spring, a zip through treetops, or dinner served on the sand, are what keep visitors coming back to this Central American country situated between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean.

Those flying direct from Miami can land in Liberia (on the northwest coast) in three hours. From there, it’s a brief drive to El Mangroove (elmangroove.net), an eco-minded boutique

hotel nestled on the Gulf of Papagayo. An indoor-outdoor, bohemian vibe permeates the property, from the effortless blend of water and wood, to the regional artworks scattered throughout. Of the 85 rooms, we recommend a Bark Suite—if only to luxuriate in its hammock, a perfect spot for a midafternoon nap or reading session.

Given its coastal persuasion, activities at El Mangroove lean toward the aquatic. Embark on a private boating excursion to explore islands dotted with caves and massive structures like Monkey Head Rock, all the while snorkeling in the surrounding waters. Keep an eye out for eagle rays, whose black-and-white-spotted patterns pop in a sea of azure. Upon returning to El Mangroove, grab a paddleboard and time your voyage to the sunset, when the board’s LED lights cast Technicolor hues across the water.

A 130-foot-long pool lies at the heart of the hotel, making it an ideal basecamp. Lay your claim to one of the loungers before meandering over to Bearth Spa, where treatments end with a divine coconut macaron. Both El Mangroove restaurants are also adjacent to the pool, including the bar-meets-beach-shack Matiss and the upscale Makoko. At Matiss, you can’t go wrong with an über-fresh poke bowl or

chifrijo matizado, a traditional meal of chicharróns, beans, rice, avocado, and pico de gallo.

Come nighttime, make a beeline to Makoko, where local, organic produce, Costa Rican beef, and sustainable seafood commingle in dishes like roasted king sea bass with shiitake mushrooms and short rib with an apple-jalapeño puree. Makoko is also open for breakfast, and the absolute best thing on the menu is rice and beans topped with *queso tico* (“fried cheese”) and Salsa Lizano, a ubiquitous Worcestershire-esque sauce.

Fully fed and blissed out, you’re ready for the rainforest. Hop on a petite plane for a 40-minute flight to the charming town of La Fortuna. From there, ascend up a serpentine road to arrive at Tabacón Thermal Resort & Spa (tabacon.com), resting near the landscape-defining Arenal Volcano.

Though the volcano is technically active, visitors needn’t fear lava spews. Instead, Tabacón guests can savor the fruits of the volcano’s labor, i.e. the resort’s network of thermal springs that are naturally heated underground by Arenal’s magma. These springs—the largest in Costa Rica—are between 72 to 105 degrees Fahrenheit, lined with black sand, and rich in minerals that promote stress relief, a feat made all the easier with a cocktail from the swim-up bar.

When you tire of languishing in the springs (at approximately a quarter past never), ask the concierge to arrange a more extreme adventure. Join Athica Canopy for a zip-line tour through the rainforest (arenalcanopy.com), home to howler monkeys and electric-blue butterflies. The course also boasts a “Tarzan” swing that delivers a free-fall thrill. Afterward, saddle up for a horseback ride to achieve the ultimate volcano view (weather depending).

Now in need of sustenance, dine on some

traditional grub. Tabacón’s Ave del Paraíso restaurant specializes in Costa Rican cuisine, like *sopa negra*, a bean soup best enjoyed with the house-made hot sauce (be careful) and one of the resort’s own IPAs. Other food options range from the high-end Los Tucanes to a private dinner held in a bungalow and featuring a four-course feast cooked in front of you.

A member of the Leading Hotels of the World, Tabacón takes relaxation to the next level at its fabulous spa. While the interior is reminiscent of equally chic institutions stateside, the spa’s open-air bungalows set this property apart. Whether you opt for a full-body honey treatment or a back-centric massage accented by essential oils, you’ll find yourself immersed in the rainforest, where a chorus of cicadas and rainstorm rumbles form the soundtrack to this indulgent moment. ◀◀

THE ARENAL VOLCANO SUPPORTS A VAST SYSTEM OF THERMAL SPRINGS AT TABACÓN, INCLUDING THE ADULTS-ONLY SHANGRI-LA GARDENS. THE RESORT’S SPA IS ALSO NESTLED AMID THE RAINFOREST AND SPRINGS.



COURTESY OF TABACÓN THERMAL RESORT & SPA



COURTESY OF EL MANGROOVE



WATER-BASED ADVENTURES ARE KEY TO THE EL MANGROOVE EXPERIENCE. PADDLEBOARD AT SUNSET, EXPLORE NEARBY ISLANDS LIKE MONKEY HEAD ROCK, OR RELAX BY THE POOL. LATER, SWAY IN YOUR PRIVATE HAMMOCK AND SAMPLE AN ARRAY OF FRESH CEVICHEs AT MATISS.