

EXPLORING COSTA RICA

Latitude 10: Laid-Back Lifestyle, Naturally

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It seemed as if we had travelled to the end of the world. First we took a taxi, then a bus, then a ferry and then two more buses.

We were drained and, by the time we knocked on the big wooden gates of Latitude 10 Resort, our shirts were permeated with sweat.

But I guess that's how most tourists feel when they travel to Mal País – or the bad country, for a strict translation. And I guess that's why Bob Florsheim and Rick Hughes chose to make this area on the southern tip of Guanacaste's Nicoya Peninsula home for their hotel.

What better place than far from the hustle of modern-day life to build a vacation retreat? At this place, nature overwhelms civilization, and guests can leave their rooms unlocked.

The two business partners and longtime friends came to Costa Rica on a whim. With no itinerary and only a guidebook in hand, they landed in the busy capital city of San José and followed a typical tourist path to Arenal Volcano, in north-central Costa Rica, and then out to Tamarindo, a popular, bustling beach town in the northern province of Guanacaste. A friend invited the travellers to Mal País and, once they made the trek on uneven roads with scarce and oft-hidden signs, they decided to put down roots.

"We saw a piece of property ... and, following up on a longtime desire to build a resort, we made an offer," said Hughes. "It was the best (parcel) on the beach. We wanted the property in the worst way."

Tapping into the talent of colleagues in their real estate business in California, in the United States, they began constructing a vacation spot that embraced the surrounding nature. The project – from conception to reality – took nearly four years.

"They designed the project in such a way that they didn't need to cut down trees," said Jonatan Gur-Ari, general manager of the hotel. "They might have cut a few small trees, but they really kept it to a minimum.



are surrounded by woods, everything from the high-thread-count sheets to the banana-iced French toast served for breakfast spells luxury.

Latitude 10 really is a destination for people who want to put a fluffy, white bed on the skirts of the Pacific Ocean and not worry about high tides or other people. It's for people who want to bird-watch as they brush their teeth, but don't want to crunch over leaves to reach the sink.

The casitas are constructed entirely of dark almond wood and decorated with locally crafted furniture. In lieu of windows, shades drop down at night. The bathrooms, accented with intricate tile work, are full rooms in themselves, with banana leaves bowing over the walls. Florsheim and Hughes decided to forego air-conditioning and television in the rooms so that nothing would stand between visitors and their enjoyment of nature.

"We wanted people to feel immersed in the jungle," said Hughes. "We wanted a place where people could appreciate the interaction between nature and themselves because there is so much to be gained."

The beach itself offers a stunning backdrop, and guests often might find themselves alone on white sands licked by waves of the mighty Pacific.

It was at this resort that my husband and I stood outside on a cloudless mid-October day. Exhausted and in need of a place to empty our smog-filled lungs after months in San José, we were ready for everything that living on Latitude 10 represents: *pura vida*. ■

Jungle Fever: Visitors to Latitude 10 Resort appreciate stunning and varied views of the Pacific Ocean and enjoy a laid-back, worries-be-gone lifestyle.

Photos Courtesy of Latitude 10

Today, even when (government officials) recommend taking out trees, they find a way to keep them."

Hidden among a thick tropical veil, five private *casitas* (little houses) that are entirely open to the outside elements are connected by winding stone paths. The owners refer to

their resort as "five-star camping".

But camping is a bit of a misnomer. Although the rooms are wall-less and guests

Getting There, Rates and Info.

Drive two hours from San José west to Puntarenas and take a 1.5-hour ferry ride to Paquera, on the Nicoya Peninsula. Drive another hour-and-a-half through Tambor to Cóbano. From there, drive a half-hour to Mal País. At the crossroad, turn right (north) toward Santa Teresa. Latitude 10 is approximately four km on the left. You will see a large wooden gate with 10° carved on it.

High season rates, including breakfast and light pre-dinner hors d'oeuvres, are \$395 for the Master Suite, \$295 for the Premium Junior Suite and \$245 for the Junior Suite. To rent all five casitas, the rate is \$1,790.

For information and reservations, visit www.latitude10resort.com, or call 2640-0396.



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