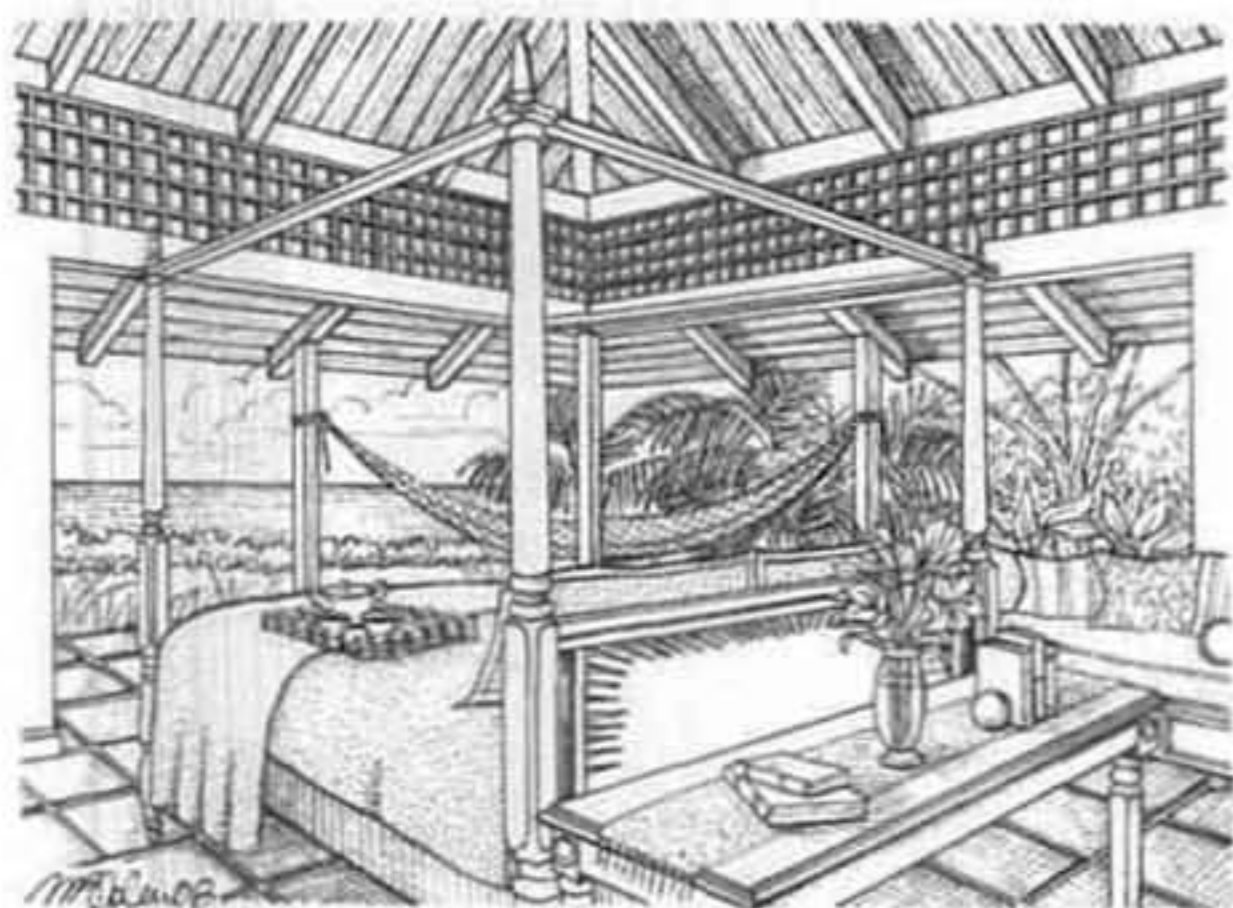


Latitude 10°

THE 40-MINUTE FLIGHT from the Central Coast north to Tambor culminated on an airstrip that might best be described as "rustic." (At least this one had white lines running down its length, which seemed to suggest some degree of maintenance. One or two of Costa Rica's jungle strips would give Indiana Jones pause.) A 45-minute drive over the kind of dirt roads only a chiropractor could love brought us to the seaside town of Santa Teresa. Favored by surfers for its long, languorous Pacific breaks, Santa Teresa is little more than a string of sport shops, funky little eateries and bars, and the odd cybercafé or two. After an abrupt turn through unmarked gates, we found ourselves encircled by the dense green of the rain forest. A delightful young woman named Marianne greeted us with real warmth and led us along a stone walkway to an utterly enchanting hideaway.

Originally built as a private retreat for a wealthy Costa Rican couple, Latitude 10° opened as a hotel just last year. Wanting to share the place with friends, they constructed five villas clustered around a "clubhouse," along with a bar, open-air dining area and pool. Having gone to all this trouble, the owners realized that they



couldn't escape to their private Eden as often as they'd thought, so rather than let the place lie fallow, they opened it to paying guests.

The villas are wonderfully inviting plantation-style sanctuaries with high ceilings and polished concrete floors. Latticed windows let in a constant breeze (there is no air-conditioning, but ceiling fans do a more than adequate

job of keeping things comfortable) and the soothing rhythm of the surf, breaking on a beach less than 100 feet away. The furniture is crafted of dark wood brightened with textured fabrics in a rainbow of colors. Local art and carvings greatly add to the distinctive atmosphere. Open-air baths occupy secluded courtyards surrounded by towering trees and rustling palms. There, dual showers have been mounted onto a curve of exquisitely tiled wall, and water cascades down onto a floor of smooth river stones. Overall, the villas feel far away from the everyday world, an impression that is enhanced by the welcome absence of televisions and the Internet.

Three villas are set back from the ocean in lush and tranquil surroundings. However, we recommend the two "Master Suites" that are closer to the Pacific and significantly larger, with lounge areas and spacious verandahs. (These would be ideal for parents with young children, and indeed, the whole resort can be reserved by a group or family.)

Latitude 10° is situated on a particularly picturesque stretch of white sand backed by palms. Striated rocks at the water's edge create pools filled with darting fish when the tide goes out, but a short walk in either direction will take you to rock-free zones for easier swimming. Next to the clubhouse, there is a crescent-shaped pool with an infinity edge that merges into the ocean, while a comfortable underwater shelf makes a fine perch for sipping a mango margarita.

The cooking is done by a French chef who likes nothing more than to work his magic with freshly caught fish provided by one of the guests. A dinner menu is available early each afternoon and you choose from two appetizers and two main courses. A dish of Pacific shrimps in flaky puff pastry came with a luscious curry sauce and tangy pineapple chutney; sea bass was served with a purée of root vegetables, wild mushrooms and carrots; and flawless profiteroles were accompanied by a spectacular chocolate sauce.

For the energetic, the local horseback riding is excellent, surfing lessons are always available and superb deep-sea fishing can readily be arranged. However, at the end of the path to the beach, there is a wonderful shaded area with chaises longues and a hammock. Here, it was our custom to settle with a pile of books, occasionally wandering along the beach to pick up a few shells, a burst of activity generally followed by an extended snooze. In other words, just the kind of regimen you are meant to follow in paradise. Junior Suite A for one or two, \$385; Master Suite, \$585. Entire resort, \$2,125. Tel. (506) 640-0557. Email: info@latitude10resort.com