

COSTA RICA

One month living a more pura vida.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

When I decided to fuck off to Costa Rica for the entire month of February, eschewing a dreary NYC winter and my daily responsibilities, I was dreaming of the cloud forest. I wanted to play guitar next to a fire pit and walk across hanging bridges. I wanted to eat gallo pinto and drink Costa Rican arabica while contemplating my future, which was still so murky and blah. I was skeptical of 'pura vida,' which I believed to be a manufactured slogan to lure tourists in, but I was willing to try anything shy of Ayahuasca to find myself again.



And it worked, but not in the way I expected. It wasn't necessarily Costa Rica that gave me the perspective I had been looking for, it was slow travel itself. I had forgotten what it was like to enter the 'free zone,' or that liminal space of travel where everything fades away and you truly get to live in the present, whether that present is blacking out on Dramamine or almost dying in a riptide.

However, we did come to the conclusion that Pura Vida is a pleasantry used to describe a simple truth: life is pure when you find yourself in beautiful places. From the brilliant red macaws flying overhead to the dreamy Pacific sunsets, I was very grateful to build a routine there.

Nadie te quita lo bailado.

COLIVING WITH *Selina*

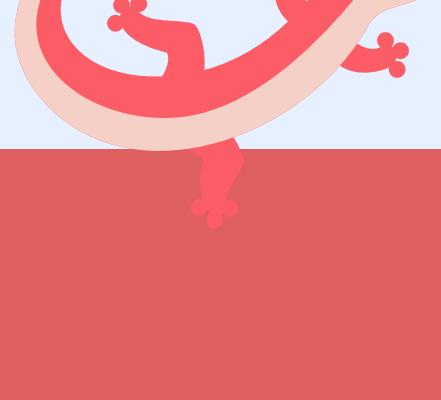
What is Selina, might you ask? Well, this unique, upscale hostel company started in 2007 in Playa Venao, Panama. In an effort to balance travel, work, adventure, and wellness, they created beautifully-designed properties all over Latin America and expanded rapidly.

Now that all sounds enticing, but we were most intrigued by their co-living package. For a month, a digital nomad could stay in up to three Selina properties, enjoying seamless transitions, free co-working space access, and built-in community with people doing with same thing.

While a standard room at Manuel Antonio would cost \$2900 for a month, the co-living package worked out to about \$2160 for two people. Much cheaper than my New York City rent, and a reliable way to travel while working a 9-5. And because we were traveling without a car, we knew Selina could always call us a shuttle or taxi if we needed it.

We broke the three places rule and actually stayed at four:

- San Jose (4 nights)
- Manuel Antonio (12 nights)
- Monteverde (8 nights)
- La Fortuna (5 nights)



SAN JOSÉ

When reading about San Jose, you tend to get a lot of people saying "skip it and get to your actual destination as soon as possible." We decided to ignore this advice in favor of seeing how Costa Ricans actually live. We found the San Jose Selina to be the most community-centric, with a lovely rooftop, delightful murals, and a welcome drink made with a traditional chorreador. Our community resident asked us to set intentions with him every morning – if you just rolled your eyes, I get it, I did too. But being mindful is a great way to start a monthlong trip, so I rolled with it and scribbled my thoughts with the group.

Overall, San Jose seemed pretty livable. Parque España was green and shaded, the Central Market was bustling, and the coffee was delicious. While I wouldn't spend much time there if I only had a week in Costa Rica, it was a great way to adjust after coming from NYC.



Things to Do

Britt Coffee Tour

The OG coffee tour. So much so that their website is literally coffeetour.com. Their coffee is ubiquitous across Costa.

Cafe Miel Garage

This cute coffee shop in Barrio Otoya has incredibly sweet coffees – my faves being the Nutella Iced Latte and the Argentinian empanada.

Mercado Central

This bustling central market has lots of Costa Rican charm, and is great for a quick shopping trip.

El Social

Right near Parque Espana, this place had a \$6 cover but was filled with young Costa Ricans just trying to party. Yummy drinks.

MANUEL ANTONIO

Oh, Manny Tony. The love of my life. Sandwiched between a rainforest and a beach, I experienced Pura Vida™ for the first time. Even when I bled out from a riptide gone wrong or was eaten alive by sand ants, I could not stop smiling. The Selina there is a resort-like property and hosted lots of activities after working hours. We yoga'd, pole danced, surfed, kayaked, and watched the Super Bowl with newly-minted Eagles fans.

Manuel Antonio was recently rated one of the top 25 beaches in the world by TripAdvisor, and it's VERY queer-friendly. The sunsets are top tier and the jungle ringing the beach is inhabited with mischievous capuchins and shaggy sloths. There's even a white man with dreads named Mambo selling every kind of drug you could want. The waves are a bit vicious and the prices a bit high, but I'd go back.



Things to Do

Playa Biesanz

A hidden, secret enclave that is more shaded than other beaches – reminiscent of a lake beach. Buenas vibras, and the occasional sloth.

Surf Lessons

After being waterboarded in Puerto Rico, I was not into the idea. But at Playa Espadilla, the instructors are very kind and experienced. But on a bad day, it's quite impossible to surf, so choose wisely.

Emilio's Cafe

Delicious cafe with the best view. Get the coffee-crusted steak, the pastries, the fish, literally anything.

Parque Nacional Manuel Antonio

Embarrassing that we didn't get to do a tour of the park, but heard the monkey and sloth sightings are quite worth the \$20 entry fee.

MONTEVERDE

Monteverde is romantic. It is for the bird watchers and sunset chasers, the coffee cuppers and thrill seekers. It is not, however, for the remote workers who just want to have a cheap meal, only to find out the nearest restaurant is 2km away. The road to Monteverde is rocky, and once you get there, it definitely feels other worldly. But instead of feeling calm, sailing above the clouds, surrounded by beautiful flora and fauna, it's more supernatural. The sky pours while completely sunny. There are scary spiders in the bathroom. And forget palm trees, you're surrounded by New Jersey-esque forest with the loudest fucking birds you will ever hear. And when you try to go to bed, the wind outside will make it sound like you accidentally fell asleep in a hurricane.

While I enjoyed the high quality food, tours, and sunsets that exist in Monteverde, there is little available to do for free. Better to spend a weekend there, and not your entire budget.

Things to Do

Night Walk

A particularly spooky and wonderful activity that involved being a menace with a flashlight. Saw snakes, sleeping toucans, and a very fast sloth swinging by.

El Tigre Waterfalls

A cool, if not stupidly expensive three-hour waterfall hike with hanging bridges, horseback riding, and a zipline bike for a lil' extra. Still worth it – wear waterproof hiking boots.



Don Juan

If you're not a snob, you'll love this combined chocolate, coffee, and sugar cane tour. A great sensory experience, and lots of yummy nibbles.

Monteverde Extremo

Didn't get to go, but heard this adventure park has awesome bungee jumping and the most extreme zipline in the country.

LA FORTUNA

After a jeep-boat-jEEP ride that carried us across Lake Arenal, we were finally deposited in front of a looming presence that is the Arenal Volcano. She's a beaut, and an active one at that. As this was our last week in Costa Rica, we decided to take it easy, so we skipped out on the arduous hikes and stuck with the hot springs, rope swings, and yummy tings. We stayed in a Selina 'teepee' experience, which was basically just an aesthetically-pleasing hut with a bed inside, but it was equipped with outlets and a fan, so we were quite comfortable.

If you're an adventure geek, La Fortuna has everything from white water rafting to canyoning. However, it will be a curated, touristic experience from head-to-toe. So for those that want authenticity, I recommend Nicaragua for its volcanoes or Colorado for some decent rapids. But if you want a one-stop shop, I can think of no better place.



Things to Do

Hot Springs

There are a bunch of hot springs available due to the geothermal nature of the town, but the worth it winners are Tabacon (\$80), Baldi (\$44), and the free one (\$0).

El Salto

This rope swing is not for the faint of heart. Located in Rio Fortuna, this gorgeous and free rope swing takes practice, and the locals WILL show you up.

Cerro Chato

Did anyone say illegal volcano hike? Second to Arenal, this is the biggest volcano that you can hike. It will take five hours and may be the hardest hike of your life – do not attempt in rain. And do your erosion research.

White Water Rafting

Did not go, but heard the II & III rapids in the Balsa River are tons of fun.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Are you a broke bitch now?

Yes. The prices in Costa Rica are about 25% cheaper than New York, but that just means instead of paying \$15 for a restaurant meal, you're paying \$12. So add that up for breakfast, lunch and dinner everyday for 30 days, and you're looking at a hefty bill. We tried to meal prep, but our sad gluten-free sandwiches paled in comparison to chifrijo and gallo pinto.

How did you get caught in a riptide?

We swam a *little* too far out, a *little* too close to a group of spindly rocks. While Daisy got pulled out and had to dive low to swim against the battering waves, I got pulled into and bashed against the rocks. When I came out of the water, bleeding heavily from my wounds, I got sad nods and "pura vidas" from the useless lifeguards.

Is Costa Rica a good destination for slow travel?

While Costa Rica was a bit too touristy for my taste, it was very easy to find new destinations every week, drink the tap water, and operate without a car. If I had to do it again, I would perhaps choose a city that I could do weekend trips out of, like CDMX.

Is Selina worth it?

Perhaps one could find a cheaper Airbnb with wifi, but they would be missing out on crucial opportunities to find community and join free events. We knew absolutely no one in Costa Rica, but felt that we had someone watching over us. Some friends said that Selina has the big travel picture, but misses some important hospitality details, which is fair.

What was your favorite part of the trip?

Ah, the Dora question. I loved surfing, having dinners with friends, and watching the sunset in Monteverde. The night walk was amazing, and we found a small waterfall in Monteverde for only \$6 to play around in.



QUESTIONS? EMAIL

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