

TRAVEL + LEISURE

COSTA
RICA

DOUBLE
ISSUE

DESTINATION OF THE YEAR



▲ Beef empanadas at Atizo, in Playas del Coco.

◀ Spanish-style architecture in Las Catalinas.

THE BEST OF GUANACASTE



It's all happening on this golden stretch of Costa Rica's Pacific coast. **Dobrina Zhekova** gives her guide to the newest places to eat, stay, and surf.

OCCUPYING THE northwestern corner of Costa Rica, the province of Guanacaste is blessed with more than 400 miles of Pacific shoreline. The region's expansive black-, gold-, and white-sand beaches receive swells from the south and the north, making it a world-class surfing destination. But Guanacaste—which takes its name from the national tree, known in English as the elephant ear—in fact has a striking variety of ecosystems, including rainforests, dry forests, and wetlands. Alongside all the natural beauty,

you'll find cute beach towns with surf shops, boutique hotels, concept stores, and family-owned restaurants serving healthy dishes made with local ingredients.

There's a big buzz around Nosara, a beach town in northwestern Guanacaste. Its newest boutique hotel, **Sendero Nosara** (*doubles from \$420*), was opened in February 2023 by Stefanie Tannenbaum, a hospitality executive, and her husband, Chris Begg. The pair came during the pandemic and ended up staying. They renovated an existing hotel to create Sendero, which features airy rooms and natural décor. It is steps away from the nearly five-mile-long stretch of white sand at Playa Guiones.

The **Four Seasons Resort Costa Rica at Peninsula Papagayo** (*doubles from \$1,200*), set against the lush landscapes of the northern Pacific coast, has a new beach club, Virador; an indoor-outdoor space, Wellness Shala; a refreshed Kids of All Seasons club; and two crescent-shaped bays inhabited by three species of monkey. Daily surf classes are held at Playa Prieta or at the renowned Witch's Rock surf break in Santa Rosa National Park. Guests also have exclusive use of a nearby adventure park with ziplines and suspended bridges.

Casa Chameleon at Las Catalinas (*doubles from \$945*) is an adults-only retreat set on a leafy hilltop overlooking the beach town of Las Catalinas. The property has 21 stand-alone villas with private saltwater plunge pools, eclectic furnishings, and postcard-worthy sunset views. Inspired by Spanish-colonial homes, the whitewashed 45-room **Santarena Hotel** (*doubles from \$265*), also

in Las Catalinas, is right by the beach and has a rooftop terrace, a pool, and an idyllic courtyard with ocean views.

In addition, Las Catalinas is home to several restaurants, shops, ice cream carts, and a wellness center. Don't miss **Copper & Stone**, a gourmet supermarket and wine cellar founded by Canadian-born chef Demian Geneau.

In Playa Negra, former Costa Rican surfing champion Andrea Diaz has more than 25 years of experience competing, coaching, and leading retreats to some of the province's most renowned surf locations with her **Andrea Diaz Surf School**. "I strive to inspire surfers to embrace the thrill of riding waves while fostering a deep respect for the ocean, its inherent beauty, and our *pura vida* surf culture," Diaz says.

Atizo (*entrées \$30–\$58*), in the beach town of Playas del Coco, is run by the Argentine chef Mariano Fernández and his wife, Lumar Cuccioletta, and serves inventive global cuisine with a Costa Rican twist. Shareable favorites at the casual open-air restaurant include house-smoked brisket with sprouted lentils, a vegetarian Milanese, and *chorreadas*, a traditional dish of savory corn pancakes that come with *labneh* and cured snapper. The wine selection celebrates "underrated grapes and conscious winemakers," Cuccioletta says.

Up the coast is another noteworthy restaurant, at the Andaz Costa Rica Resort at Peninsula Papagayo. **Ostra** (*entrées \$22–\$80*) features organic vegetables and fresh seafood, including smoked scallops and oysters from the Gulf of Nicoya.

Mycelium (*entrées \$18–\$26*), an Asian-fusion restaurant in Playa Negra, is

FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF CASA CHAMELEON HOTELS; COURTESY OF ATIZO





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: COURTESY OF FOUR SEASONS HOTELS & RESORTS;
COURTESY OF CORAZÓN SURF CAFÉ; COURTESY OF LAS CATALINAS;
COURTESY OF OSTRANDAZ COSTA RICA RESORT AT PENINSULA PAPAGAYO;
COURTESY OF LAS CATALINAS; COURTESY OF CASA CHAMELEON HOTELS

operated by Czech-born chef Kamila Rundusová, known as Kamu, and offers dishes like freshly caught tuna *tataki* with green peas, wasabi purée, and ponzu sauce. Also in Playa Negra, **Corazón Surf Café** (entrées \$5–\$11) brews coffee grown on a farm in an area famous for producing some of the best beans in the country. Owner Marina de Almenara and her partner Daniel Miro Torres make their own pastries, açai

bowls, granola, and pancakes. “It’s a coffee shop with a clubhouse vibe,” de Almenara says. In the evenings the café becomes **Zaguato** (entrées \$10–\$16), a burger joint with cocktails and draft beer.

In Las Catalinas, **Pots & Bowls** (entrées \$7–\$21), started as a food truck and grew into a full-service restaurant thanks to its founder, Juliana Gil, and her passion for fresh, healthy Costa Rican ingredients. 🌍

▶ A villa at the Four Seasons Resort Costa Rica at Peninsula Papagayo.



◀ Las Catalinas and Playa Danta.



▲ Eyeing the coffee at Corazón Surf Café, in Playa Negra.

◀ Breakfast at the Santarena Hotel.



The atrium of the Santarena Hotel, in Las Catalinas.



Ostra, at the Andaz Costa Rica Resort at Peninsula Papagayo.

