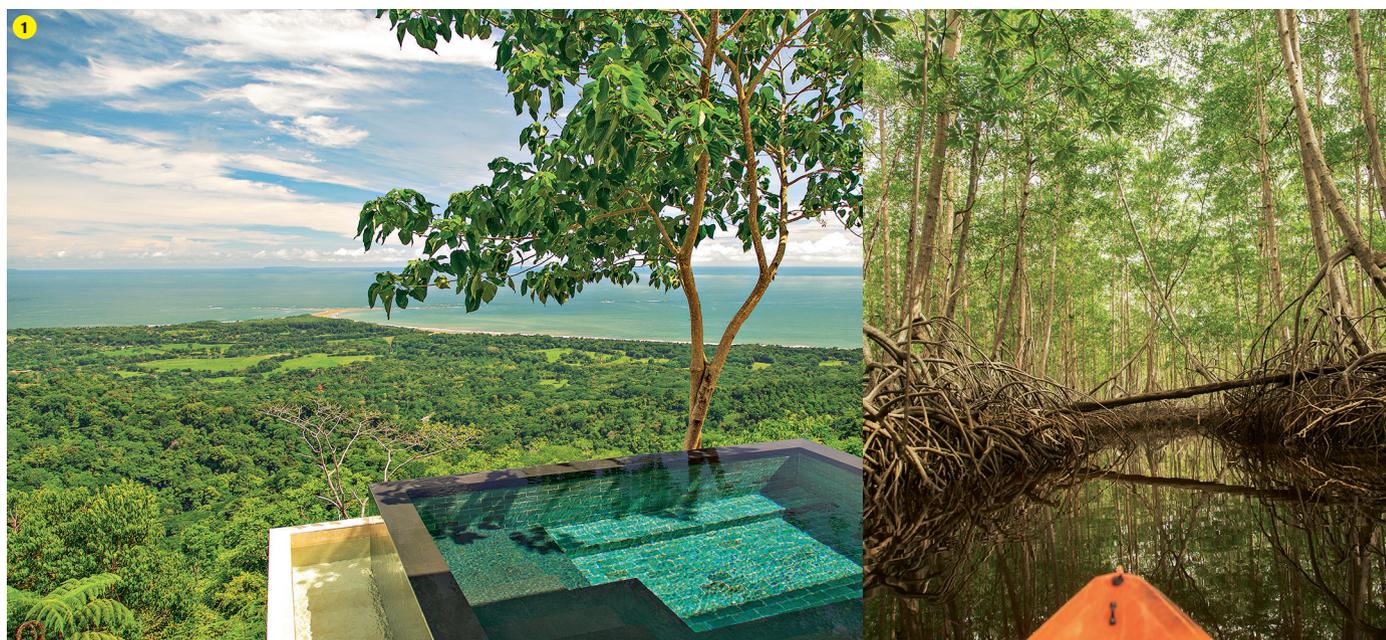


Amy Bryant



# Wildest dreams

Chilling out among capuchin monkeys and caracaras in Costa Rica

ARRIVING IN COSTA RICA at the tail end of the rainy season, one would hope to tick off the country's Top Trumps wildlife without the crush of tourists: the scarlet macaw that's the cover star of the Lonely Planet guide; the gregarious white-faced capuchin monkey; and two- and three-toed sloths. But having landed in a tropical storm, which almost brought our hire car to a halt thanks to zero visibility, I was fearful of looking at anything other than frantic windscreen wipers on the three-hour drive from the airport to the town of Quepos.

What relief, then, to find the sunshine winning out in the end – perfect conditions for exploring Manuel Antonio National Park, whose 1,680 acres of rainforest and beaches first enticed us to Costa Rica's Pacific west coast. We had booked a day with a local guide, Johan Chaves, and thanks to his expertise in birding and photography we spotted and snapped more species than I thought possible during our time in the park. Driving ourselves meant we could then skip along the coast at our own

pace, stopping wherever we fancied, for stand-up paddleboarding, swimming in waterfalls and birdwatching.

We were staying at the budget-friendly Villas Rio Mar, just outside Dominical, a bohemian beach town that surfers flock to. The resort is set in tropical rainforest and the gardens were a playground for yellow-throated tou-



cans, fire-red summer tanagers and hummingbirds. Home for the next few days was one of the simple, white-washed bungalows dotted around the grounds, and we watched incredible sunsets from our private patio. Surrounded by swaying palms, the hotel also has a large pool, spa treatments and a tennis court.

Heading 30 minutes south to Uvita for more surf, sand and another national park (Marino Ballena, where the famous whale-tail beach formation is revealed at low tide), we then checked into Kurà Design Villas, a stylishly modern eco-friendly mountaintop retreat I never wanted to leave. The phrase 'boutique hotel' doesn't do this seductive Bondesque lair, 3,250ft above sea level, justice. We chose to drive, but the hotel can collect you for the 15-minute off-road ascent into the cloud layer. Adults-only, each of its six vast, open-plan suites has 180-degree views of the ocean thanks to expansive balconies and glass walls (not to mention glass showers for two).

This is a honeymooner's heaven whatever the season. And on top of fresh fusion seafood at the hotel restaurant, cocktails at its rooftop Sky Lounge and the friendliest staff imaginable, there were further sightings of parakeets and yellow-headed caracaras from the emerald-green, saltwater infinity-edged pool that juts out over the rainforest.

**1. Kurà Design Villas**  
From £500 per night  
(kuracostarica.com).  
**2. Villas Rio Mar**  
From £45 per night  
(villasriomar.com).  
visitcostarica.com