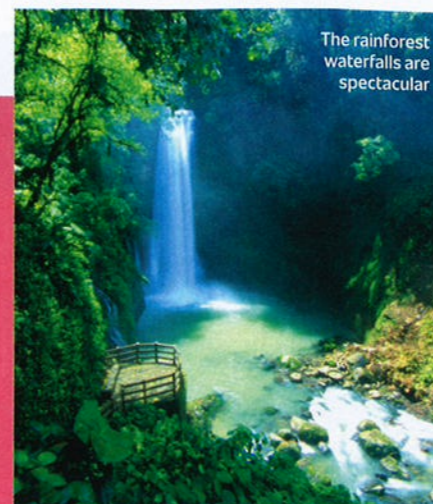
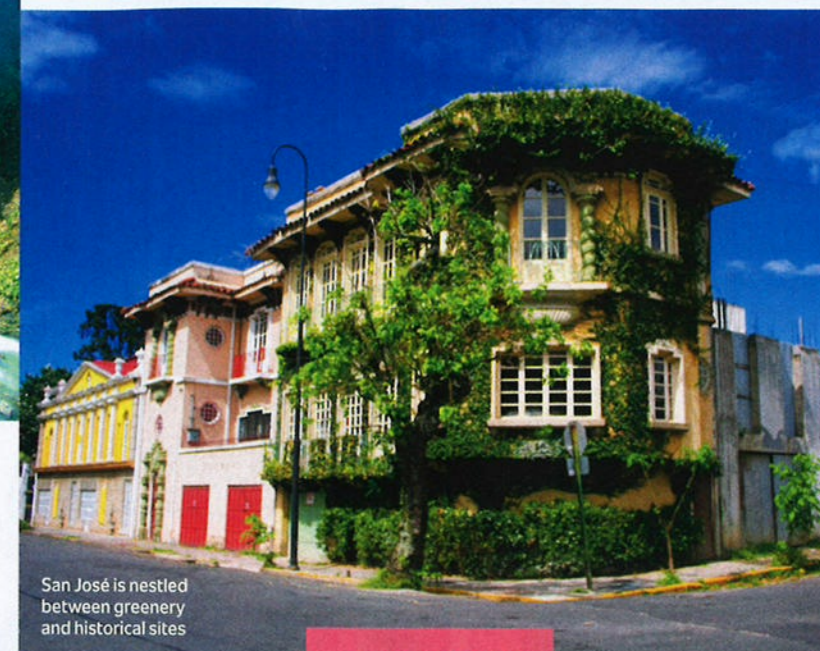


# COSTA CONTENT

*The Central American country of Costa Rica is the place to relax, reinvigorate and recharge, as Look's @gisellelikes found out...*



The rainforest waterfalls are spectacular



San José is nestled between greenery and historical sites

When a country comes with a tagline of 'the happiest place on earth', it's a difficult accolade to live up to. And yet the Costa Rica Tourism Board doesn't only claim that – their greeting 'Pura Vida' means 'pure life' and guarantees its happy status, having been labelled as one of only five of the world's 'Blue Zones', where people live longer.

Arriving in the capital city of San José, there's a lively feel. Nestled between greenery, it's a bustle of street food and historical sites. I'm staying at the Hotel Grano De Oro – a haven of stylish décor, peacefulness and luxury service with a botanical feel, enhanced by a fine dining restaurant that gives some of the profits to its own women's refuge.

The next morning, our guide (check out [Visitcostarica.com](http://Visitcostarica.com) for recommendations) tells us about everything from the rich wildlife we encounter on the three-hour drive to Volcano Arenal, to the local coffee culture (it's a caffeine lover's dream), and is quick to point out rare species of monkeys and snakes as we hike through the volcanic rock an hour later. Starving, we stop for a dish favoured by Ricos (Costa Ricans), the casado: a meal of rice, meat, black beans and vegetables – a delicious and healthy way to rebuild our strength before we head to

the Don Juan Finca (farm), where I try fresh pineapple from the plant. With dinner included for just £20pp, it's a unique experience.

Did you know there are five types of hot springs in Costa Rica? Geothermally heated mineral water filters down from the volcanoes and is said to have healing properties. It's the main reason to visit La Fortuna, where I recharged at The Ecotermas Springs (from £40pp). But at the Tabacón Thermal Resort and Spa (from £300ppn), springs are included. The suites are palatial with whirlpool baths, and the hotel provides a shuttle to its restaurant and the springs, which are spread out over an Instagrammable 29,960 acres of rainforest, where each hidden path leads to more private pool gems. Or you can just sit in the waterfalls, like I did, and pretend you're in a music video.

Next, Nosara. It's a four-hour drive through plantations, with a stop at Café Y Macademia for an iced latte to die for, and more stunning scenery. The focus at the Harmony Hotel (from £275ppn, [HarmonyNosara.com](http://HarmonyNosara.com)) is wellness. A short walk from my boutique bungalow (with an outdoor

## FACT BOX

For more information about trips, hotels and individual areas, visit the Costa Rican Tourism Board at [Visitcostarica.com](http://Visitcostarica.com). All prices based on peak season stays, between September to May. Temperatures are usually a consistent 28°C with occasional bursts of rain. British Airways fly direct from Gatwick to San José, from £623 return.

shower and hammock) is the sprawling Guiones Beach. A haven for surfers, it's one stretch of the 900 miles of pristine coastline Costa Rica offers, and the ideal place to pull up a towel and take in the gold to red sunset. Enjoy a guided after-dark tour (from £38pp) to see turtles laying eggs on the beach.

The next morning, I dip in the hotel's pool and head to an outdoor yoga class at the healing centre – one session a day is included in your stay – and before leaving guests are asked to plant a tree on site as a way

of giving back – Costa Rica is a leading country in sustainability and ecotourism.

Moving on, I arrive at the Hotel Tango Del Mar (from £223ppn, [Tangomar.com](http://Tangomar.com)), situated on the white sands of the Nicoya Peninsula. Rooms include James Bond-style tiki huts, sprawling boutique rooms with Jacuzzis and chic villas that can be rented by groups. It's a chance to recoup and relax at the sea-view spa.

A short car journey away is the cool, hipster surfer town Santa Teresa and the Hotel Tropic Latino, with its restaurant Shambala, run by superstar chef Randy Stiles. Sip cocktails before dining on dishes of insanelly good octopus parpadelle and seared tuna.

What is so apparent in Costa Rica is how content everyone is. I return healthier, more relaxed and happier.



Pineapples are the country's biggest export



Get friendly with the Costa Rican turtles