







By Zeke Del Mar

# Pura Vida in Costa Rica

Photography By Tina Gutierrez

**H**ere I am, sitting on a longboard, out past the breakers, wondering what the hell am I doing here. Yesterday I was surfing the Internet, doing research, and today I'm about to surf my first wave. It was always a childhood dream to be a surfer and now I'm about to make that dream a reality.

Welcome to Playa Guiones, Nosara, Costa Rica, a secluded sleepy surf community five hours west of San Jose, on the Pacific coastline. It offers a variety of waves for every experience level. This beach offers some of the most consistent year-round surfing and a no-fighting-in-the-lineup opportunity to catch a wave. Lush jungles of Guanacaste trees, chirping birds and howling monkeys surround the beach. Playa Guiones encompasses a *pura vida* lifestyle of complete relaxation and an obsession with waves and surfing. This is why Safari Surf School landed here.

Playa Guiones, a vibrant tranquil village filled with expatriates, ticos (locals) and surfers is a true surfer's playground. Once you arrive, via taxi shuttle or a short 45-minute flight from San Jose on Nature Air, you are greeted by your new family, the Safari Surf School team. Tyler, Sonja, Ileana and Kimbo's warm personalities ensure your stay will be a memorable one.

The Safari Surf School was created and continues to be run by Tim and Tyler Marsh, experienced surfers from Hawaii. They impart their surfing techniques to the students with the basics of "popping up," finding your "sweet spot," "paddling hard" and gaining the experience of knowing when to ride the wave. The School brings a unity of self, strength and brotherhood to the experience. You are there to explore your strengths and weaknesses, enjoy the culture and cuisine and connect with a group of similarly driven people.

The School has created an "all-inclusive" type surf package that includes transportation, varying luxury accommodations, two surf lessons per day (morning and afternoon), yoga lessons, breakfast and dinner, and a much-needed one-hour massage at the Tica massage studio. The accommodation choices are Arco Iris, The Harmony Hotel and L'Acqua Viva.

Arco Iris is great for the VIP surfers who want to grab a bungalow rental or a private suite. The owners of Arco Iris will customize your trip to your liking with a helicopter transportation and a Ford Excursion limo. Arriving in style, they continue with a welcoming beach party. The property has a state-of-the-art fitness facility that offers private jiu shi tzu lessons. They even include access to a private chef during your stay.

The Harmony Hotel is for the eco-conscious traveler. The hotel has received the Certificate for Sustainable Tourism from the CST Committee. The Harmony prides itself on being a sustainable property, using solar panels to heat the hot water. The restaurant serves organic, vegetarian food, and a juice bar serving drinks with sustainable bamboo straws. The healing center is another highlight of the hotel, with daily yoga sessions, relaxing holistic





spa treatments and sustainable tropical grounds.

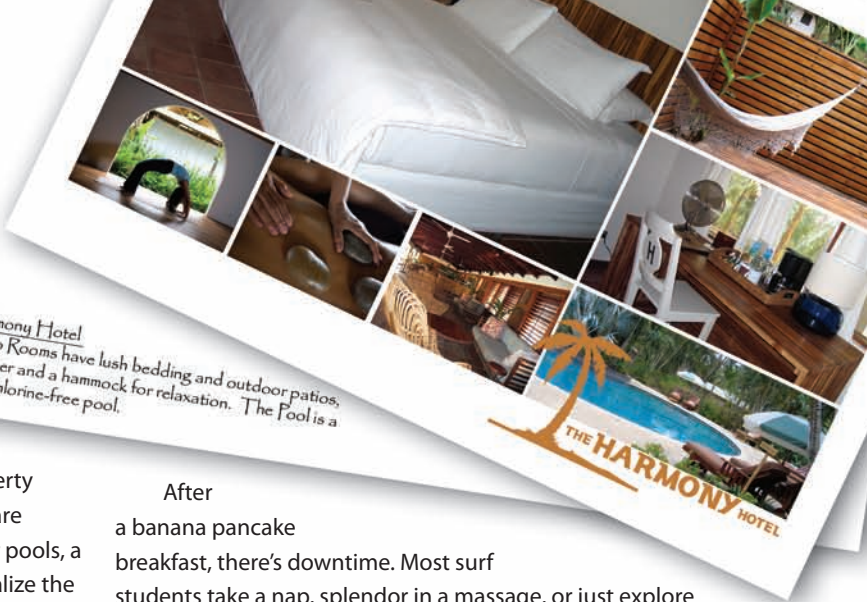
L'Acqua Viva is Nosara's five-star resort.

Tucked away from the main road, in a secluded area about one kilometer from the beach,

L'Acqua Viva's architecture brings life to the property in a harmonious Bali-esque style. The 35 Bali villas are surrounded by Costa Rican tropical forest. Salt-water pools, a restaurant, a Bacardi bottle bar, and spa facilities centralize the suites. There are deluxe rooms, master suites and presidential suites. Much detail went into planning the rooms, as evidenced by the mahogany furniture, bamboo steps and vibrant Costa Rican colors. L'Acqua Viva is a great resort for the family vacation. While you're out surfing, the wife can spend time at the spa and the kids can spend the day at the kiddie pool.

A typical day at the Safari Surf School is packed with lots of activity. Everyone gathers at the hotel, Casa Tucan, the school's home base, where the day starts with fresh fruit, checking in with your instructor and finding the right board for your size and experience. Then there's a three-minute walk down to the beach at 7 a.m. for a low-tide one-hour surf lesson. My first lesson with Tyler was the best; he had great tips about finding your "sweet spot" on your board (for balance) and the best way to "pop up" for a wave. The first few lessons consist of riding the white break just to get your bearings and proper form when riding a wave. I got sage advice on how to avoid drowning by utilizing the "turtle roll" (flipping the board and your body under the break of the whitewater).

*The Harmony Hotel*  
The Coco Rooms have lush bedding and outdoor patios, with a shower and a hammock for relaxation. The Pool is a salt water chlorine-free pool.



After

a banana pancake breakfast, there's downtime. Most surf students take a nap, splendor in a massage, or just explore the Nosara village. I decided to venture to the yoga studio for some lessons with a couple of the guys. Tim Marsh explained that yoga immensely helps with surfing techniques. Yoga and surfing both require balance, strength, focus and a clear head. With a group of guys, it can be different, as Jason from Aspen explained his yoga experiences: "It's Thug Yoga ... and we end the class with a 'Namaste Motherf\*\*ker.'" With that mentality, we walked in and the instructor asked what areas hurt; Adam, with silent gestures, just banged on his chest. It was hilarious, but I have to admit, the yoga really helped. Yoga is a great pre-stretch for surfing as it strengthens your core and puts you in the right mindset. I had much better surf lessons after taking the yoga classes. It's an added value to the package that I strongly recommend to any surf newbie.

Through the days, you alternate instructors for each lesson. It's a great way for students to gain different insights and tips, and you end up finding your perfect instructor. All the instructors—Tyler, Kimbo, Rolo, Cristian, Pio and Alonso—are enthusiastic, and each has a strong connection to the ocean; they just love to surf. After the lessons, the instructors go out during high tide and it's amazing to watch the talent that they exhibit. It's a realization that surfing is truly an art form, a connection between man

*L'Acqua Viva is furnished with queen- or king-sized beds, 26" flat-screen satellite TV, and a mini-bar. The suites have two levels: a master bedroom above and daybeds for the kids below.*



*Arco Iris Bungalows are surrounded by a tropically adorned pool area with a waterfall jacuzzi. The Suites offer a mountainous view of the beach (great for assessing surfing conditions). They come with a private pool, and Jacuzzi bathroom.*





and ocean. When Cristian, the local surf celebrity, is in the water, it is mesmerizing to see his talent, a unique style he has been perfecting for 13 years.

In the afternoon session, students go out for high tide, a great time for more experienced surfers. The waves are higher and a little stronger. I had a hard time getting past the impact zone (where the wave breaks). The ocean can be very unforgiving and high tide is when you feel it. We had joked about the instructors constantly telling us to "paddle harder," but after a few lessons, you understand why... you have to paddle for your life to get past the impact zone to make it to the "outside." There are many moments of tumbling and turtle rolls to get to the sweet lineup of waiting for the waves.

After the second lesson, you'll want to nap and shower before dinner. Either Tyler or Kimbo introduces you to an evening exploring the gastronomy of Nosara. This is a great time to really get to know the culture of the country, the other students and cut loose with some strong margaritas and ceviche.

The best places to eat in Nosara are pretty much any restaurant, but my favorites were La Luna, Marlin Bill's, Dos Lorenas, Harmony Hotel and Casa Tucan. La Luna has the best view of the ocean at night. The atmosphere has a South Beach vibe with candle lanterns and pumping music. Dos Lorenas has the most amazing ceviche with fresh dorado (mahi-mahi). Marlin Bill's has great seafood and the service is impeccable. Harmony Hotel has a sushi bar and a vegetarian menu. The juice bar is a definite plus. The smoothies are the best, with holistic additives to really nourish the body. And Casa Tucan, our home-away-from-home, has a warm staff, great breakfast and the best Margarita pizza in town. The Jungle Java serves great gourmet teas and coffees and the locals seem to love the breakfast burritos and an added bonus, they offer free Internet and free calls to the U.S.

If you're still not tired, there are other adventure excursions provided by Nosara Paradise Rental. The tours include sport fishing, a nature tour, a canopy tour, snorkeling, kayaking, whitewater rafting, a unique turtle experience, and rentals of bikes and ATVs to ride around Nosara.

You're in the lineup, it feels right, you paddle as hard as you can, the moment comes, you pop up and cruise down the line (either left or



right) and it's the most amazing experience, an exertion of adrenaline, a feeling of accomplishment. Now I know why the hell I was here. Coming away from this trip of six days, seven nights, there is an understanding as to why so many students end up coming back to Safari Surf School – it's like coming back to old friends and some awesome waves. For a guy's getaway, a chance to surf the waves of the *Endless Summer*, it's time for a visit to Nosara, Costa Rica.

Check out [SafariSurfSchool.com](http://SafariSurfSchool.com) for more information about the school, the package deals and to book a trip. For the hotels' information, please visit Arco Iris Resort at [www.costaricaresortproperties.com](http://www.costaricaresortproperties.com), The Harmony Hotel at [www.harmonynosara.com](http://www.harmonynosara.com), L'Acqua Viva Hotel & Spa at [www.lacquaviva.com](http://www.lacquaviva.com). Check out Nosara Paradise Rental excursions at [www.nosaraparadiserentals.com](http://www.nosaraparadiserentals.com).●

