



# Casa Roja Planning and Arrival Guide

Arriving in Costa Rica

At the Airport

Getting to Casa Roja from San José

Shuttles

Domestic Flights

Rental Cars

Hotels Near San José

Preparing for Your Vacation

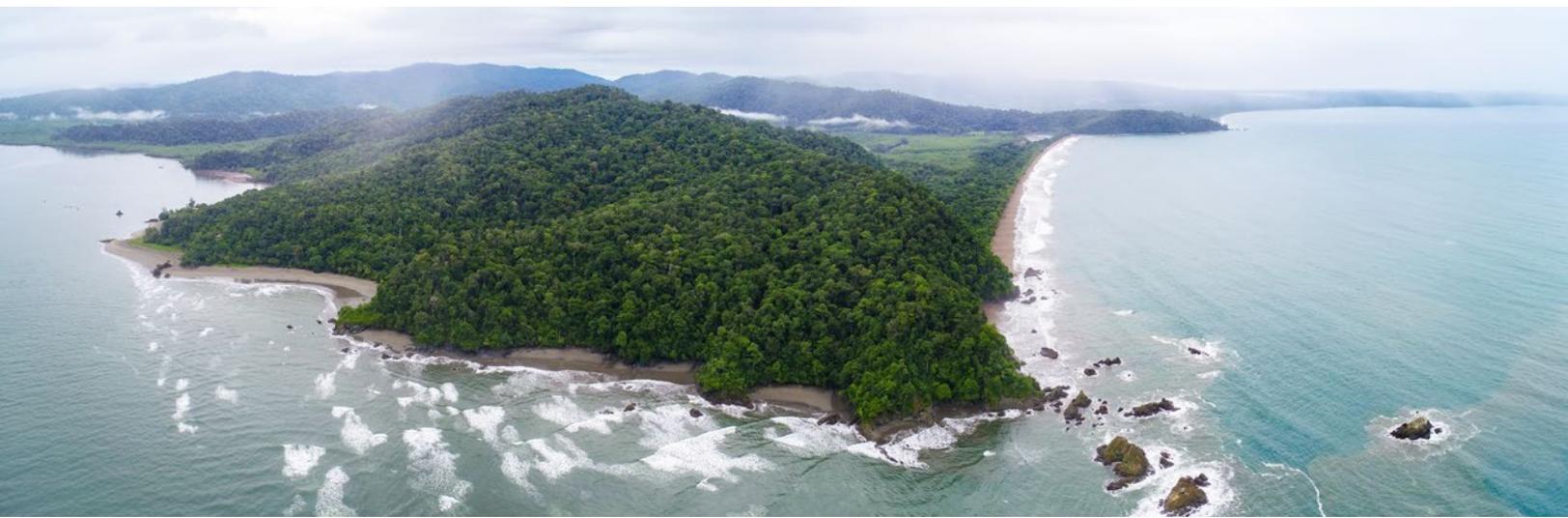
Pre-Plan Activities

Beach Towns Between San José and Casa Roja



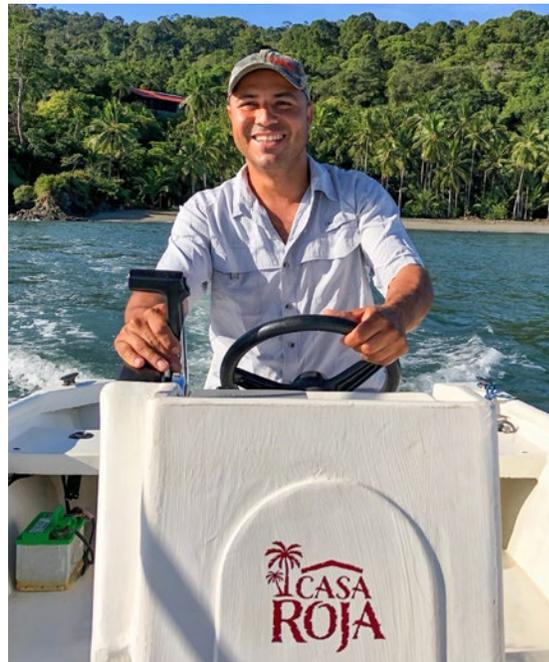
*Boca del Río Sierpe, Costa Rica*

All photos taken by Casa Roja and FISHBIO friends and families.



As you prepare for your Costa Rica vacation, we recommend that you review this brief guide for an overview of your travel options.

**First and foremost, if you encounter any issues or delays upon your arrival in Costa Rica, don't hesitate to reach out to Argenis (Are-yen-is), your local guide and caretaker at Casa Roja. His cell phone is (+506) 8499-5025. If you have a U.S.-based cell carrier you will likely need to dial +506 first. You can also reach him at the same number on WhatsApp. He will be the person who picks you up in Sierpe, and will be with you throughout your stay at Casa Roja. His English is good and he has been a nature guide in the Sierpe region for over a decade.**



## Arriving in Costa Rica

Your options for getting to Casa Roja upon your arrival in Costa Rica depend on the time of day you land in San José. It takes about 5 hours to drive from San José to Sierpe, your jumping-off point to Casa Roja, and you will need to arrive in Sierpe before 5:00 pm in order to travel by boat to Casa Roja on the same day.

If your flight arrives in San José in the afternoon, you won't have time to travel all the way to Sierpe before dark (which restricts river boat travel). Also, you wouldn't want to miss out on the Costa Rican scenery along the way! Lodging options in the town of Sierpe are very limited and "spartan".



If you need to spend a night before traveling to Sierpe/Casa Roja, you can either stay in a hotel near the airport, in downtown San José (not recommended due to potentially terrible traffic at rush hour), or in one of the beach towns along the way, such as Jacó, Quepos (near Manuel Antonio), or Dominical. Jacó is about 2 hours from the airport, Quepos just under 3 hours, and Dominical about 3.5 hours.

If you arrive in San José in the morning, you have various options to continue to Sierpe and Casa Roja on the same day. For mid-day arrivals, we recommend that you continue onwards to one of the beach towns along the way, and spend a night there before traveling to Sierpe. If you arrive in the evening, a hotel near the airport is the most convenient option to get some rest before continuing your journey the following morning. This guide contains information to help you with your travel arrangements based on your circumstances and personal preferences. For assistance or recommendations specific to your needs, please don't hesitate to contact us.



## At the Airport

Once you clear customs and walk outside the airport, the chaos begins. You will be greeted by a mob of drivers offering rides; a combination of official airport taxis (orange), and normal taxis (red). The red taxis are not authorized to operate at the airport, and are thus called “Taxis Piratas” who will take you to their car parked in the garage across the street, outside of the airport boundary. If you’ve arranged for pick-up by a private shuttle to Casa Roja or another destination, this is where your driver will be waiting with a sign with your name on it. Do not take a ride from anyone who is not expecting you.



## Hotel Shuttle

Local airport hotels provide shuttles that can be found to the right when you exit the airport terminal. The closest hotels (Hampton Inn and Holiday Inn Express) use the same shuttle van that runs 24-hours a day at 15-minute intervals. As you exit the airport, the shuttle pick-up area for all hotels is just a few steps to the right. There is no sign designating a pick-up location, so expect to be a little unsure; just wait a few minutes and you’ll notice various shuttle vans stopping to drop-off/pick-up passengers. Here you will see Deli Malinche, a good place to grab a little food or drink, although don’t expect much. According to the internet it opens at 5 a.m. (but we have seen it open after 7 a.m.) and closes at 10 p.m.



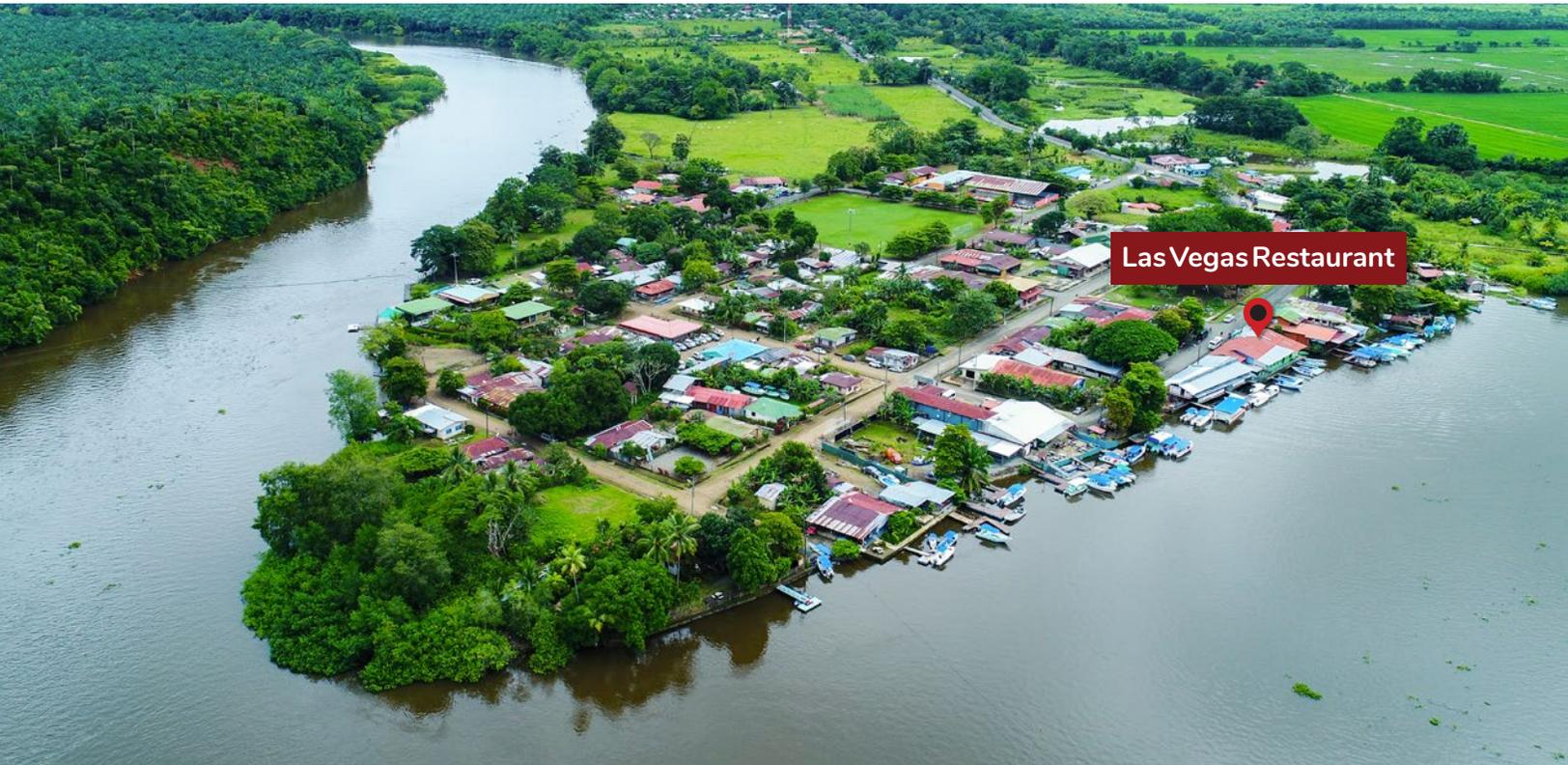
## Taxis

In Costa Rica, official airport taxis are orange and charge higher rates than regular city taxis, which are colored red. Only take orange or red taxis at the airport; don't take unofficial taxis, which may not have a meter or proper insurance, and may be looking to take advantage of novice travelers. Orange taxis are the only ones allowed at the arrival terminal and can be found to your left when you exit the terminal. There should be a taxi attendant there to help. Legal taxis will be red or orange and have an insignia with an ID number on the driver side and passenger side door. Elsewhere on your trip you may find red taxis, since they are standard through the country, and are generally considered safe.

If you are staying in a hotel in downtown San José, expect to pay about \$30 each way and be aware the trip can take well over an hour during periods of heavy traffic at rush hour. When traffic is light the trip to downtown San José hotels can be made in 20 minutes.



## Getting to Casa Roja from San José



The small town of Sierpe, about 30 km (18 miles) upriver to the east of Casa Roja, is the main gateway to the Osa Peninsula, including Casa Roja. Whatever your chosen mode of transportation to Sierpe, the **Las Vegas Bar and Restaurant** is our meeting point in town. If you have any challenges during travel, find your way to Las Vegas in Sierpe, which you can't miss in the middle of a small town. Argenis will be there waiting with the boat to take you downriver to Casa Roja.



## Shuttles

**The easiest way to get to Sierpe (Casa Roja) is by private shuttle.** We can arrange for a modern private shuttle to transport you from the airport, your hotel, or from anywhere else to Sierpe, where your guide and caretaker Argenis will pick you up in our boat.

A private shuttle will take you anywhere you want to go, whenever you want to go. For example, guests can be picked up in the afternoon at the airport and taken to a beach or mountain resort for a night, then taken to Sierpe and Casa Roja the following day. Any combination of travel is possible.

**Pedro Alvarez (P: 506 8597-3140)** is a trusted shuttle operator we work with regularly. He lives in Sierpe with his family and has a nice, new, modern shuttle van. The price for a private shuttle from San José to Sierpe, or Sierpe to San José, is about \$300, but can be a little more for larger groups or from downtown hotels, or if you want to overnight along the way. We can quote you a price when we know your exact travel requirements. Pay Pedro directly once you arrive at your destination, in USD.



**Shared shuttle can be more economical.** Shared shuttles operate on a regular schedule and can be an economical way to travel for a group of only one or two travelers, especially during low season. Several companies, including Easy Ride, Super Shuttle, Grayline, and Interbus, are available for booking a shared or private ride to Sierpe from San José. Pick-up is available from Juan Santamaria International Airport in San José. The drive from San José to Sierpe is 280 km and takes about 5-6 hours, depending on how often the shuttle stops. Booking is usually required at least 48 hours in advance, and at least two passengers are required to operate the shuttle. The price to Sierpe ranges from \$79-98 per person.



Shuttle Service	Rates	Phone Number	Website / Email	Comments
Pedro Alvarez	\$300- \$400	+506 8703-2121	✉ <a href="mailto:transalvarezso@hotmail.com">transalvarezso@hotmail.com</a>	Located in Sierpe but can take you anywhere. We arrange for you.
Super Shuttle	\$79 SJO to Sierpe	1 (202) 448-2910	🔍 <a href="https://www.supershuttlecr.com/contact-reservations/">https://www.supershuttlecr.com/contact-reservations/</a>	Minimum of 2 passengers to operate shuttle. A single traveler can pay for 2 people. Departs at 5:00 AM, 3:00 PM
Gray Line	\$98 SJO to Sierpe	1 (800) 719-3905	🔍 <a href="https://www.graylinecostarica.com/">https://www.graylinecostarica.com/</a>	Minimum of 2 passengers to operate shuttle. A single traveler can pay for 2 people. Departs at 7:40 AM
Easy Ride	\$79 SJO to Sierpe	1 (703) 879-2284	🔍 <a href="https://www.easyridecostarica.com/">https://www.easyridecostarica.com/</a>	Minimum of 2 passengers to operate shuttle. A single traveler can pay for 2 people. Departs at 4:30 AM, 10:00 AM
Costa Rica Trip Guide	\$89 SJO to Sierpe	1-800-668-5056	🔍 <a href="https://www.transportationincostarica.com">https://www.transportationincostarica.com</a>	Minimum of 2 passengers to operate shuttle. A single traveler can pay for 2 people. Departs at 6:00 AM
Zuma Tours	\$145 SJO to Sierpe	+506 2642-0024	🔍 <a href="http://www.zumatours.net">http://www.zumatours.net</a>	Minimum of 2 passengers to operate shuttle. A single traveler can pay for 2 people. Departs 7:00 AM

## Domestic Flights

It is possible to fly from San José to Palmar Sur or Drake Bay, but Palmar Sur flights are limited at times, and if you arrive in Drake during bad weather, we may not be able to pick you up due to ocean conditions. If you want to fly please try to fly into Palmar Sur. A pick-up in Drake Bay is possible, but requires a boat ride on the ocean, where weather and ocean conditions can delay or prohibit small boat travel.

If you choose to explore this option, check airline websites periodically as flight schedules change frequently.



Domestic Airlines	Website	Phone Number	Location
Sansa	<a href="http://flysansa.com/en">http://flysansa.com/en</a>	1-877-767-2672	1 flight daily to Palmar Sur 2 flights daily to Drake
Aerobell	<a href="https://www.aerobell.com">https://www.aerobell.com</a>	+506 4000-2030	2 flights daily to Drake
Skyway	<a href="https://skywaycr.com">https://skywaycr.com</a>	1-888-524-9396	1 flight daily to Palmar Sur 2 flights daily to Drake



## Domestic Flights in Costa Rica

★ Destinations closest to Casa Roja 📍	Airlines		
Palmar Sur	Sansa	Skyway	
Drake Bay	Sansa	Skyway	Aerobell
Golfito	Sansa		



Drake Bay

## Rental Cars

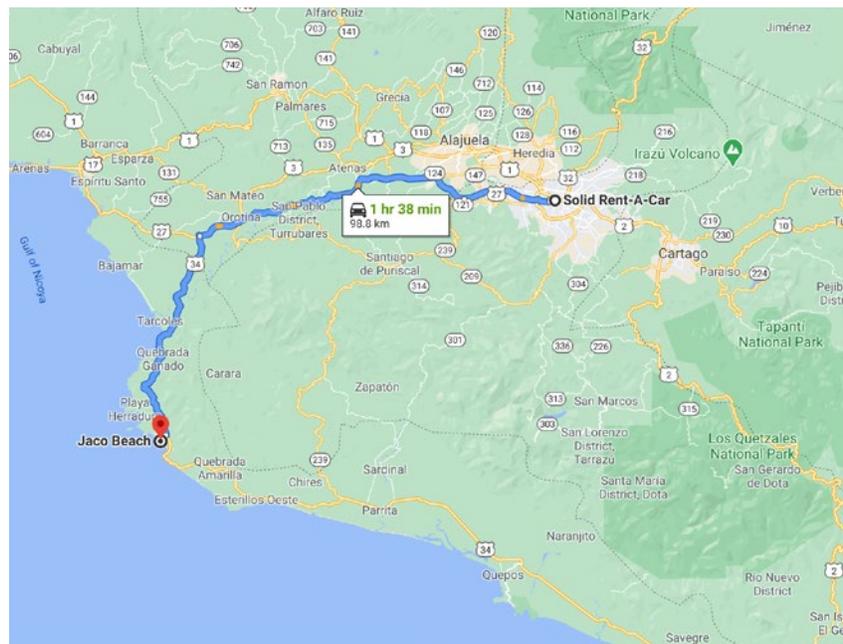
**Use caution when renting a car and traveling the roadways in Costa Rica!** Driving in a foreign country is always stressful, particularly navigating to and from the airport area. Also, locals are often a bit more lax when it comes to what you may consider safe driving habits, and driving in the sometimes heavy traffic in Costa Rica can quickly amount to a “white-knuckle experience.” In addition, be aware that rental cars are crime magnets, and when you rent a car in Costa Rica, you are practically advertising yourselves as tourists, which makes you a prime target for petty theft and being ticketed by law enforcement.

If you do decide to rent a car, perhaps because you need one for another part of your Costa Rican vacation, we have had positive experiences with [Solid Rent A Car](#). Solid will pick-up/deliver to wherever you stay around San José. They also pick up and deliver rental cars to Sierpe, the nearest town to Casa Roja (\$30 fee). Expect a \$900 hold on your credit card, and always take pictures of your car when you receive/return it. There is usually a three day minimum rental in the high season, but other times of year one and two day rentals are available.

Car Rental	Rates	Phone Number	Website / Email	Comments
Solid	Small SUV, 3 days, 1-way San José to Sierpe, \$132	1-800-390-7065 +506 2442-6000	<a href="http://solidcarrental.com">http://solidcarrental.com</a> <a href="mailto:info@solidcarrental.com">info@solidcarrental.com</a>	Free shuttle from SJO airport to their location 5 minutes away. Will do 1-way to Sierpe (\$30).
Adobe	\$63/Econ	1-855 861-1250 +506 2542-4800	<a href="https://www.adobecar.com/en/">https://www.adobecar.com/en/</a> <a href="mailto:info@adobecar.com">info@adobecar.com</a>	San José 1-way to Uvita, \$75 fee. 3 Day min.
Vamos Rent-A-Car	\$93/econ	1-800-601-8806 +506 4000-0557	<a href="https://vamosrentacar.com">https://vamosrentacar.com</a> <a href="mailto:info@vamosrentacar.com">info@vamosrentacar.com</a>	Located near SJO. 1-way rental fee \$175
Hertz	\$25/Econ	+506 2668-1179	<a href="https://www.hertz.com/rentacar/reservation/">https://www.hertz.com/rentacar/reservation/</a>	Located near SJO, 1-way available to Jacó, Uvita.
National	Economy, 3 days, \$187	+506 2242-7911	<a href="https://www.nationalcar.com/en/car-rental/locations/cr.html">https://www.nationalcar.com/en/car-rental/locations/cr.html</a>	Have counter at SJO. Shuttle to nearby location in San José. Closest location to Sierpe is Uvita.

With rental fee, insurance, and taxes, expect to pay prices similar to those in your home country. When you get a quote from a rental car company, make sure it includes full insurance, and be wary if the price is too good to be true. Some companies will quote tourists ridiculously low prices, only to inform them of the government-required insurance at the time of rental, which can double or triple the final cost of the rental.

If you are going to rent a car and drive anywhere in Costa Rica, save Google Maps data for offline use (plan ahead and do so while connected to the internet). Most roads around Costa Rica are easy to navigate, but you will appreciate Google Maps when navigating from and to the airport or when needing to travel into or through San José. Do not leave anything in parked rental cars (including the faceplate of the car stereo!), especially in resort towns such as Jacó (perhaps the worst town for petty theft in Costa Rica), Quepos/Manuel Antonio, or Dominical. Some popular destinations have parking attendants that provide some level of security, and you should opt for these when available. Police may also ticket and remove the license plates of (allegedly) illegally parked vehicles. Police will remove the plates, only the rental car agency can retrieve them, and it's a lengthy process. The rental car agency will bring you a replacement car, but it can get expensive.



## Hotels Near San José

Whether after a late night arrival in Costa Rica or before an early morning departure as you return home, sometimes it's convenient to stay at one of the hotels near the airport. The Hampton Inn and Holiday Inn Express are next to each other, 5 minutes from the airport by shuttle. There's nothing special about these two hotels other than convenience, and the only restaurants in walking distance are Denny's, RostiPollo, and Casino Fiesta. Both hotels use the same shuttle van that runs 24-hours a day at 15-minute intervals. Conveniently, there is a rental car building directly across the street from these hotels, including offices for Solid Rent A Car, ACE Rent A Car, Vamos Rent A Car, Toyota Rent A Car, and Thrifty Car Rental.



**Additional, perhaps better, hotel options are available a little further from the airport.** The Double Tree by Hilton Cariari San José is 10 minutes from the airport and has a hint of Costa Rican feel, whereas others have an airport-hotel chain feel. For a reasonable price, they have nicer rooms, a much better pool, and a shopping center with a cool little market (Fresh Market), a sushi restaurant, a pizza place, a few other restaurants and a pharmacy within walking distance (all of these can be viewed on Google Maps). The hotel offers a free shuttle; however, it only departs from the hotel on the hour starting at 4:00 am until 10:00 pm, and departs from the airport every hour starting at 4:30 am until 10:30 pm. If you don't want to wait at the airport for the shuttle, you can take a taxi for a small fee. The more upscale Costa Rica Marriott Hacienda Belen is also in the general area (it has a spa). The Marriott has a free shuttle, but you have to call their shuttle service to arrange pick up.



Hotel	Distance from SJO Airport	Approx. Price Range (Off-peak season / Peak travel season)
<a href="#">Hampton Inn</a>	<a href="#">1 mile/1.4 km</a>	\$120 / \$160
<a href="#">Holiday Inn Express</a>	<a href="#">1 mile/1.4 km</a>	\$120 / \$155
<a href="#">Double Tree by Hilton</a>	<a href="#">4.3 miles/7 km</a>	\$122 / \$170
<a href="#">Marriott Hacienda Belen</a>	<a href="#">3.7 miles/5.9 km</a>	\$230 / \$340

Click on hotel name in the table to get to their website. Click on the distance to a Google Map location for hotel photos and reviews. If you intend to spend more than a day in San José to explore the capital city, we recommend you arrange for a hotel closer to the city center.

# Preparing for Your Vacation

The adage “less is more” is perhaps more applicable to travel than any other aspect of life, since when you’re traveling you have to carry all of your possessions. Although this may not be an issue when traveling on an ocean luxury liner, it is when you’re on a Costa Rican adventure that may require several airport transfers, travel by bus or van, and boat rides.

## Clothing and Sun Protection

**Breathable fabrics are lighter, take up less space in your luggage and can be worn more than once, helping you to pack light.** Focus on practical, effective clothes that will keep you dry and comfortable. Modern breathable fabrics are highly recommended over cotton. We have laundry facilities on site and will wash clothes for you as needed.



**Comfortable shoes that can get wet are important. Much of your time at Casa Roja can be spent in flip-flops or sandals.** However, whenever your adventures take you away from the lodge, you should have a good pair of shoes with suitable soles for walking. Shoes that can get wet and muddy and be easily rinsed or dunked in the ocean are best. When you’re exploring the boca property away from the house and paved walkways, or other nearby places such as Isla Violin, you will want to wear tall rubber boots to help protect you against snakes and other creatures. We have a variety of sizes of botas (boots) available for you to use, so no need to pack this bulky but sometimes important item. Walking sticks are also provided.

**As you prepare for your trip, consider that proper sun protection during the day leaves you feeling better in the evening.** We see too many tourists who underestimate the sun – even on cloudy days – and are red, dehydrated, have a headache, and are generally miserable at the end of the day. Don’t let poor planning and lack of sun protection detract from your enjoyment.





Although everyone has a different level of tolerance to sun exposure, generally, the more protected you are against the sun, the better you will feel. A breathable long-sleeved shirt is invaluable, especially if you are fair-skinned. Both guide-style expedition shirts and the newer oceanwear style are appropriate, and both are popular with locals. If you are going snorkeling or will spend a lot of time swimming, consider a surfer-style shirt (rash guard) to protect you while in the water. Although seldom stylish, broad brim hats help protect your face, ears, and neck from the sun.

**Don't bring a change of clothes for each day of your vacation.** Generally, one pair of long pants for your flight, bug protection, and for the occasional cool evening at Casa Roja is appropriate. The weather in southern Costa Rica is hot throughout the year, so you will spend most of your time in light, casual clothes. Note that if you're going to spend any time in San José or any of the highland areas, you'll definitely need an extra layer or two of clothing, so pack accordingly.

**Sunglasses are a necessity, even in the rainy season.**

Sunglasses with polarized lenses offer the best protection. A leash to keep from losing them is also a good idea.

**Sunscreen and insect repellent are provided, so you don't need to pack any. However, feel free to bring your own if you have brand preferences.** You may also need them on other parts of your trip. Be aware that customs officials in Costa Rica can be strict with liquids, and we have seen liquids confiscated from both checked and carry-on luggage. Sunscreen and repellent can also be bought in stores everywhere in Costa Rica, but both are ridiculously expensive. We have had good luck getting the wet-wipe style bug repellent and sunscreen through customs (such as [Repel 94100 Insect Repellent Mosquito Wipes](#)). Buy bulk packs rather than individually wrapped towelettes.

## Money

**Dollars are accepted everywhere and can be withdrawn from ATMs.** Everyone prefers dollars, but change will usually be given in the local currency, Costa Rican Colones. ATMs are available in Jacó, Quepos, Dominical, and Palmar Norte. There is no ATM in Sierpe or Drake Bay. Maximum withdrawal per transaction



and/or day is around 200 USD at most ATMs. Please consider that ATMs are unreliable. You can bring large bills (50s and 100s in USD) for tips and tours, and 10s and 20s for shopping at local stores. Most places accept credit cards in Costa Rica, but you can't pay for shuttles, Corcovado, or Caño Island tours with a credit card.

**The tourism industry in Costa Rica is tip-based, so please factor tips into your planning.** You'll find that there is a pretty high level of professionalism among the people that work in the tourism industry, and of course only tip if you feel you received excellent service. This includes Argenis and Graciela at Casa Roja. They are permanent staff and are well paid, but they work extremely hard 24/7 to accommodate guests. We find that most guest are enthusiastic about their experience and appreciate the opportunity reward them.

## Personal items

**We provide a variety of sizes of insulated reusable water bottles, but consider bringing your favorite one from home for use throughout your trip.** We do not use bottled water. Our tap water is sourced from two streams in the pristine jungle behind Casa Roja, triple filtered and UV treated prior to reaching the house. Tap water is drinkable at Casa Roja and throughout the country.



**A flashlight is an essential item at the boca.** Whereas a water bottle is a critical item during the day, a flashlight is at night. It will help you locate animals on night hikes with Argenis, and a flashlight small enough to carry in your pocket is suitable. A small number of flashlights are available for you to use at Casa Roja.



**Bring medications and other essential personal items.** We have a well-stocked medical cabinet to address minor aches and pains, but please bring medications and personal items you consider essential.

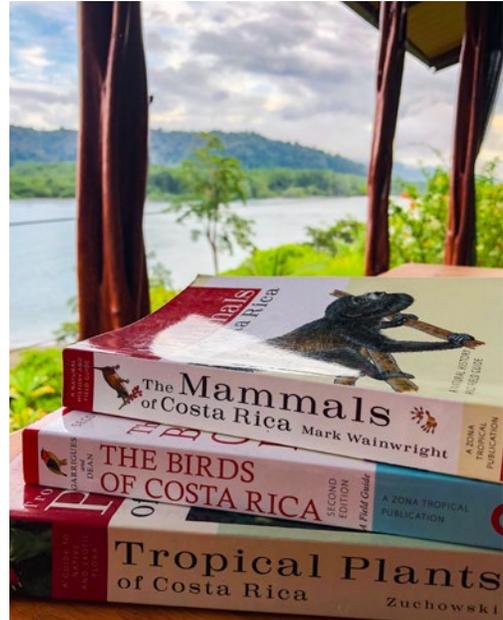
**Cannabis in Costa Rica.** Cannabis is illegal in Costa Rica, although popular opinion is in favor of legalization, and there is movement in that direction. Police often turn a blind eye to cannabis possession and use, especially in tourist areas, but they are also known to apply laws indiscriminately, so don't chance it. Purchasing cannabis in beach towns leaves you vulnerable to arrest and in contact with people that will rip you off at best, harm you at worst.



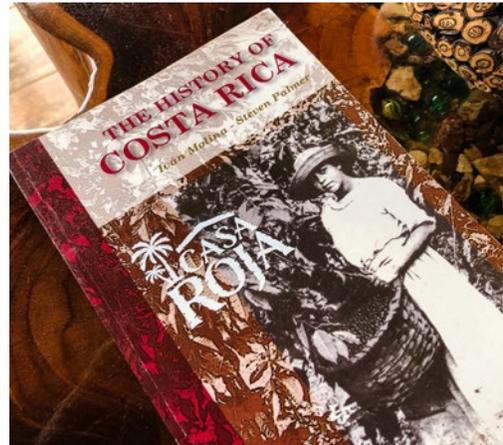
Checkpoints along highways are common, especially in southern Costa Rica where they watch for electronics and personal goods brought in tax-free from Panama. At these checkpoints it is legal for the police to search vehicles and they sometimes do. We've never seen them stop and search tourist shuttles. **If you are a medicinal cannabis patient in your country, please contact us prior to your trip for additional information.**

## Electronics, Books and Recreational Equipment

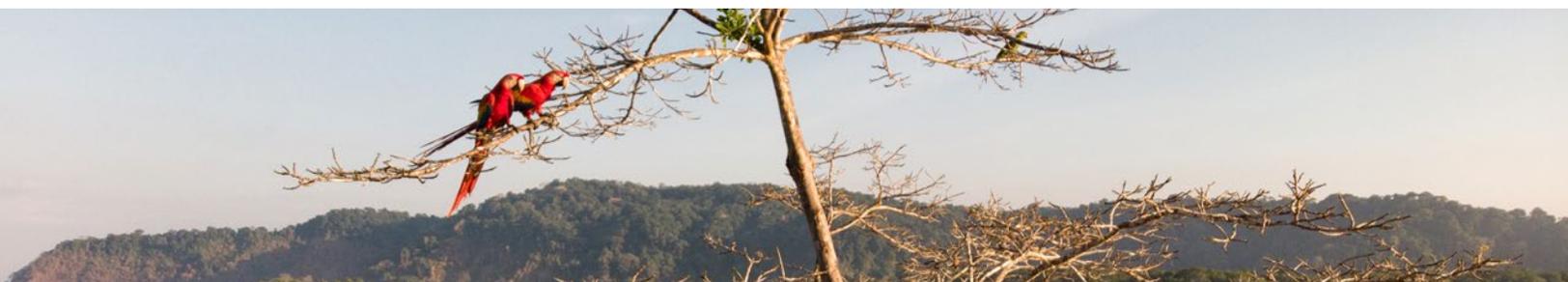
**We have wireless internet and a bluetooth speaker, but no TV or radio.** We doubt you'll want to spend much time in front of a screen, but if you think you might want that option, make sure you download movies and TV shows on your personal devices before you leave your home country. Some streaming services prevent downloading and can restrict access in foreign countries, so be aware and check with your preferred service before you leave. We have a variety of extra cables and chargers, but try to remember all the items you need to charge and otherwise keep your electronic devices operating. Keep in mind we are off the grid, and recharging can take longer than you are used to at home.



**We have a variety of Costa Rican wildlife books available at the house for you to use.** These include field identification guides for mammals, insects, birds, etc., as well as books on natural history, geology, and environment. Argenis is an expert guide who will spot and identify wildlife with you throughout your stay.



**We also have binoculars, a spotting scope, and a telescope.** If you are a serious birder and have favorite binoculars, please bring them. If you're an average wildlife viewer, we have you covered with a variety of options. We also have





a telescope for star gazing at night, generally best in the dry season during the new moon phase. The best star gazing is at mountain rainforest lodges, since the air is thinner with less ocean water vapor in the air.

**Fishing equipment and assistance is provided.** If you are the occasional fishermen, don't worry about packing any fishing tackle. We have all the necessary tackle for fishing in various environments. If you would like to charter a guide for a day of off-shore fishing, please let us know and we can make the necessary arrangements for you.



**Attitude is everything, so please bring a positive spirit and sense of adventure.** Casa Roja is a remote, off the grid ecolodge where the unexpected can happen. You may get lucky and experience an incredible wildlife sighting at Corcovado National Park, or wake up in the morning and find a not-so-desirable insect or animal in the house. Further, the boca is a harsh environment and the sun, rain, and salt are hard on everything. We do our best to keep the house and equipment in top condition, but occasional minor problems with equipment or infrastructure are to be expected. Don't let a power outage, problem with the refrigerator, or occasional lack of hot water detract from your once-in-a-lifetime adventure.



Caño Island Ranger Station

## Pre-Plan Activities

We expect that activities at and around Casa Roja will keep you plenty busy during your stay, and most things can be arranged on a day-to-day basis. However, if you are considering visits to Corcovado National Park or diving trips to Caño Island, we urge you to plan these activities ahead of time due to visitation limits and preparation logistics.

### Corcovado and Caño Island Tours

We can arrange tours to Corcovado and Caño Island for our guests. A private full day tour including boat, captain, first mate, ecoguide, park permits, and lunch usually runs about \$700 USD. Caño Island tours include snorkeling equipment and SCUBA tours can be arranged as well. Tour prices can vary slightly depending on time of year, number of people, etc. Please be flexible and understand that we do not add fees to the tours, and we try to get the best rates we can for our guests.



Access to Corcovado National park is possible at two locations from Casa Roja by boat, San Pedrillo and Sirena. Guests looking to visit the park during their stay often struggle with choosing their entry points. San Pedrillo Ranger station is the more northerly entrance point to the park, a much shorter boat ride from Casa Roja (about 45 – 60 minutes) and the area of the park we recommend for day trips. Less travel time means more time in the park!

At San Pedrillo, the main habitat is primary rainforest, with old growth trees, waterfalls and pristine beaches, and odds are that there will be less tourists on any given day than at Sirena. You'll have the same chances of spotting wildlife at San Pedrillo as at Sirena during day trips, though you might be more likely to see a Puma here. Tapir sightings tend to be a little more common at Sirena, where the park headquarters are located, about a two-hour boat ride south along the coast from the boca. Overnight stays at the station's bunkhouses are possible and maximize your chances to spot some of the less common species. Much of the forest in this area is second-growth, meaning it was previously logged but has regrown since the area was granted protected status in 1975.



Please note that all visitors to the park must be accompanied by a certified guide, and the number of daily visitors allowed in the park is limited. We can help you arrange tours with local guides, but please be sure to let us know well ahead of your trip – up to 30 days or more in advance, especially if you intend to stay in the park overnight. Tour operator and guide are usually paid in cash at the end of the day, typically in USD (Euros, checks, and credit cards are not accepted). If you are uncomfortable carrying a significant amount of cash, we can add the tour costs to your invoice.

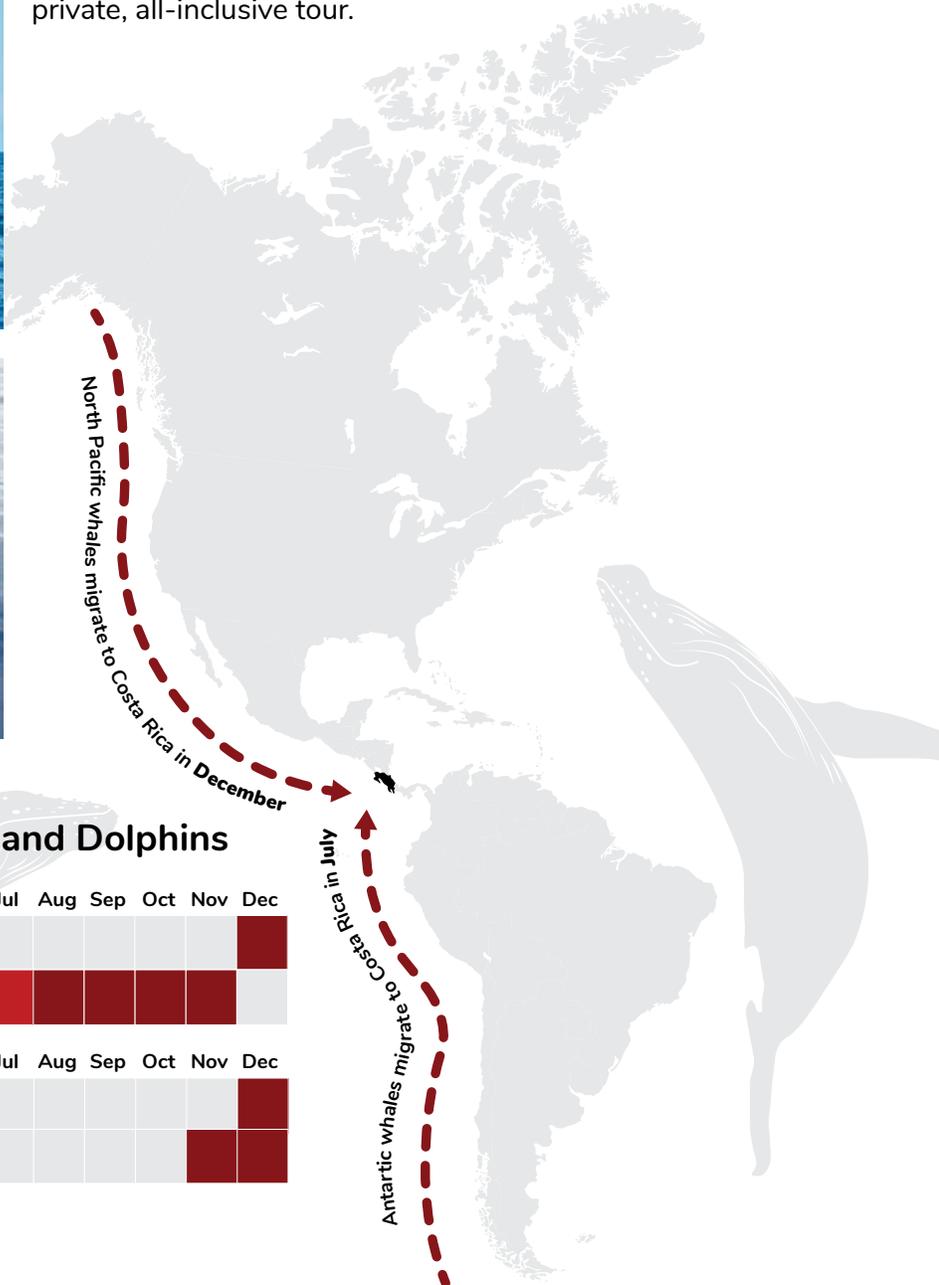


San Pedrillo Station

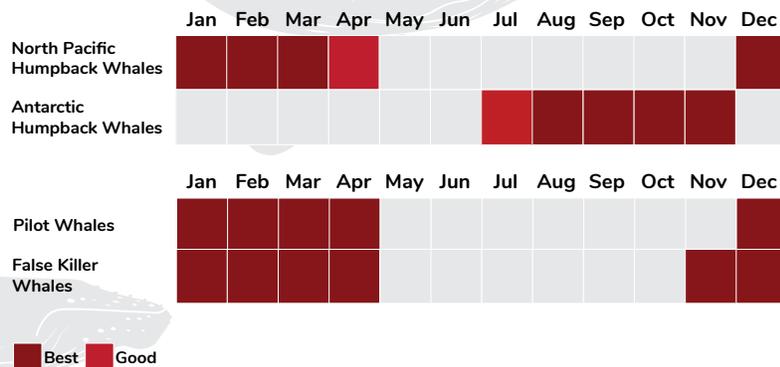
## Whale and Dolphin Watching Tours

The waters off the Osa Peninsula are a great place to see whales and dolphins. While false killer whales, pilot whales and five other species of dolphin can be spotted during any time of the year, humpback whales are seasonal visitors that migrate to Costa Rica to breed and raise their young. The best time of year to see humpback whales is July to November (southern population), and December to April (northern population). Argenis can take you on a near-shore ocean tour that always provides the opportunity to see whales, since they often visit the area between Casa Roja and Caño Island. For those

that desire the best whale sighting opportunities, we can arrange a full-day whale watching tour with a local company for you. Cost is usually around \$700 for a private, all-inclusive tour.



### Best Time to Watch Whales and Dolphins



## Beach Towns Between San José and Casa Roja



Sometimes it's convenient or necessary to overnight on your way to or from Casa Roja, and beach towns along the Coastal Highway are a great way to experience more of Costa Rica. There are four main beach towns between San José and Casa Roja of interest to tourists: Jacó, Quepos/Manuel Antonio, Dominical, and Uvita.



### Jacó

About two hours south of San José, Jacó is the first beach town you pass on your trip south to Casa Roja. Due to its proximity to San José, Jacó is Costa Rica's most popular beach town and frequently a venue for surfing competitions and other international events. Various tours and activities originate here, and a number of larger stores provide access to goods that are difficult to obtain in smaller towns and rural areas (international brands, pharmaceutical products, etc.). Jacó boasts a lively nightlife with a wide assortment of bars, restaurants and clubs, but

as a result also attracts some “seedy” characters, narcotics, and prostitution. It's far from a typical Costa Rican town, and could perhaps be considered the Costa Rican equivalent of Cabo San Lucas or Cancun in Mexico. We tend to shy away during the high season, as the main road is choked with tourists, and the nighttime party crowd is significant. Jacó is most enjoyable over the summer (May – October), when Costa Ricans are as prevalent as foreign tourists.

**ATMs** – The easiest ATM to find is at the south entrance to Jacó Walk. A maximum of \$300 USD can be withdrawn, more than most other ATMs in Costa Rica. Additional ATMs can be



found at various banks, including Banco Nacional, Banco Popular and Banco de Costa Rica, all located along the main street that parallels the beach (Avenida Pastor Diaz).

**Koko's Gastro Pub and Flamboyant Apartotel**

– This is our secret, so please don't tell anyone. This is the best place to stay in Jacó and it's almost exclusively locals enjoying a family weekend at the beach. Expect a lot of kids and families using the pool all day. But it's right on the beach and quiet at night, located on a small side street in the heart of town. Perhaps best of all, they recently opened a restaurant that has great food. Make sure you try the plantain poppers, ceviche, fish tacos, and don't even think about missing Tuna Thursday!



**O'hana Sushi and Tapas Bar** – If you are a seafood or sushi lover, this is your best option in Jacó, maybe in all of Costa Rica! O'hana's is a cool little restaurant on a side street in the heart of town. The owner is from Uruguay and his experience as a well-traveled chef results in creative and constantly changing seafood specials that you won't find on the sushi menu, so be sure to ask. O'hana's also has microbrews from Costa Rica and craft cocktails featuring seasonal fruits.

**Grafitti Restro Café and Wine Bar** – Grafitti is a relaxing, upscale (for Jacó, you can still wear shorts) restaurant located at the rear of the Jacó Walk, on the left-hand side, that has indoor and outdoor seating. Grafitti has great atmosphere, food, and service, not to mention the best wine selection in Jacó, which makes it a great choice for a nice dinner. You can also order beer from Puddle Fish which is next door. The walk also has a cigar shop, local-made bikini shop, RadioShack, optometrists, and a plastic-free store. There is an ATM at the south end of the Jacó Walk, and **clean restrooms are available at the back of the walk, behind Grafitti restaurant, that can be handy when you are out-and-about in Jacó during the day.**





**The Beer House** – This is a must visit for serious beer enthusiasts. A small tap room tucked away in a quiet corner off the main street, The Beer House offers 10 taps with Costa Rican brews you won't find anywhere else south of San José. It has a cozy environment with an expat feel and music. Open only in the evening, sometimes closed during the slow season or when they go on vacation.

**Pachi's Pan Café** – Coffee to go can be hard to find in Costa Rican towns, especially at 6 am! That's why we like Pachi's on the main street in Jacó, for early morning coffee, pastries, and bread. Open 6 am to 10 pm daily.



**Soda Jacó Rústico** – A favorite of locals and visitors alike, this traditional restaurant offers inexpensive but delicious comida típica ("typical food"), served cafeteria style in an open-air eatery. Tucked away in Calle Hicaco, it's located just a couple of blocks from the Jacó Walk, but feels like miles away from the touristy hustle of the main streets.

**Frutería El Pueblo** – This local fruit and vegetable market on Calle Lapa Verde is a feast for all senses. Colorful tropical fruit, including many varieties not usually found on supermarket shelves, are piled high on rustic tables. When you stop by to grab some fresh fruit for the road, don't miss out on their amazing smoothies sold at the counter in the back of the store. Cash only!

## Quepos/Manuel Antonio National Park

Frequently highlighted in travel publications as a must-see in Costa Rica, Manuel Antonio is a popular destination for tourists visiting southern Costa Rica. Although the park is beautiful, it is heavily visited during the high season, and the area can suffer from traffic congestion along the narrow road leading from Quepos to Manuel Antonio National Park, where the road dead-ends. This small national park is easily accessible, but often crowded. The surrounding area attracts petty theft and tourist scams, and much of the wildlife has grown emboldened by illegal feeding and careless visitors. That said,



the area is lively with lots of hotels, restaurants, and activities for kids, so it is popular with families and can be a fun place to visit. If you stay in the area, it's best to have a car, or at least be prepared to use taxis, as places to eat and things to do are spread out along the road leading from Quepos to the park. Despite – or perhaps because of – being highlighted in most travel guides on Costa Rica, we typically advise against traveling to the Quepos area solely to visit Manuel Antonio, particularly during the high season (December through April).



## Dominical

Dominical is our favorite beach town in southern Costa Rica, characterized by a dirt road fronting the beach, a laidback attitude, a younger surf crowd, tacos, and most importantly, our favorite brewery in Costa Rica – Fuego Brew Co! In Dominical you will also find great ice cream, Thai food, a cool organic mini-grocery store (with ATM in front), and impromptu souvenir stands along the beach. Dominical is a suitable spot to stop for lunch, or even grab a cold coco while you browse for souvenirs.



**Fuego Brew Co.** – Fuego Brew Co is a must-do for any visitor to Dominical (or are we just beer-obsessed?). It has great atmosphere, beer, and food. They are typically open from lunch through the evening hours. 1-liter cans (crowlers) can be filled at a moment's notice, in case you found a brew you'd like to take with you to your next destination.

**Phat Noodle** – Phat Noodle is second on our list of favorite Thai food restaurants, the other being in Vientiane, Laos. Granted, a lot of the allure comes from the cool container design, central location, fusion recipes, and the fact that it's in Dominical! If you are hungry for Asian-fusion, give it a try.





**Sol** – Gelato is obviously a passion for the owner of this place, since it’s the best gelato we’ve ever had. If you are heading to Casa Roja and looking for a treat, have your driver pull off the highway for a quick stop. It’s on the main exit (Main Street) off the highway, only 25 meters down on the left. Open from 10:00 am - 6:00 pm.

**Del Mar Taco Shop** – Perfectly located across the street from the beach, the Del Mar Taco Shop is a great place to take refuge from the sun and recharge with some food and beer. The fish taco plate is enough to satiate any surfer.



**Mama Toucan’s Natural Market** - This is a “do not miss” if you are in Dominical. Located at the first corner as you enter town, this market is Dominical’s (mini) version of Whole Foods. Whether it’s organic chocolate, local microbrews, or fresh fruit, this is a spot to check out if you are in town looking for something special. It’s on the main road as you enter town, walking distance from Sol, and there is an ATM out front.





**Mavi Surf Hotel** – Don't let the name fool you, this hotel is for everyone. A wonderfully designed and managed hotel that should be at the top of the list for any Dominical visitor. It is always sold out so book ahead in the high season.

**Tribe Boutique Hotel** – Although we haven't personally stayed at the Tribe (yet), a few of our Casa Roja guests have, and their reviews are positive. Feel free to check it out and let us know what you think.

## Uvita

The southernmost of the beach towns and only 45 minutes north of Sierpe, Uvita is best known for Marina Ballena National Park. It's a fun little town and a great place to spend an afternoon having lunch, visiting the beach, or shopping in the touristy stores near the park entrance. The best time to visit the park and walk out onto the whale-tail shaped beach is at low tide, so plan accordingly.

**Burrito Hub** – On the right-hand side as you pass through Uvita, the Burrito Hub is hard to miss. The owners are Washington expats with great stories to tell, and terrific food using only fresh, organic ingredients. Even their tortillas are made fresh daily, and the Gringo Tacos might be the best tacos anywhere! They also serve Whale Tail beer, which is locally brewed in Uvita. If you are on your way to Sierpe and just can't wait any longer to eat, this is your stop.



## Palmar Norte

The last town before Sierpe and your boat ride to Casa Roja, Palmar Norte is your best opportunity to hit a grocery store, ATM, or pharmacy. The BM Market is north of town and the first market you encounter when you reach Palmar Norte. It is the best market in town and the one where you are most likely to find familiar brands, but it's also the most expensive. In the heart of Palmar Norte, you'll also find Hermanos Mora, a locals' market where you'll find better prices, but less selection and more noise (often music blaring from the speakers out front). There is a bank and ATM 25 yards to left of the market.



We hope that this Arrival Guide has helped you in preparing for your travels and answered any questions you had about your upcoming stay at Casa Roja. We are grateful that you chose to spend time at Casa Roja and look forward to making your time at the boca unforgettable. If you have any specific questions, concerns, or comments before or during your travels to Costa Roja, please do not hesitate to contact us.

