

**Let's see what the most important tourist guides think about the Small Distinctive Hotels' members:**

## **Frommer's:**

**Discover what these specialists travel have written about us**

### **Hotel Grano de Oro**

#### **Frommer's Review**

San José boasts dozens of old homes that have been converted into hotels, but none match luxurious accommodations and professional service found at the Grano de Oro. Located on a quiet side street off Paseo Colón, this hotel offers a variety of room types to fit a range of budgets and tastes. Personally, I prefer the patio rooms, which have French doors opening onto private patios. If you want a room with plenty of space, ask for one of the deluxe rooms, which have large, modern, tiled bathrooms with big tubs. All rooms are nonsmoking.

Throughout all the guest rooms, you'll find attractive hardwood furniture, including old-fashioned wardrobes in some rooms. For additional luxuries, you can stay in one of the suites, which have whirlpool tubs. The Vista de Oro suite is the hotel's crown jewel, with its own private staircase and wonderful views of the city and surrounding mountains. If you don't grab a suite, you still have access to the hotel's two rooftop Jacuzzis. The hotel's restaurant serves excellent international cuisine and some of the best desserts in the city. The owners of this hotel, Eldon and Lori Cooke, are the prime movers behind a noble shelter for young, unwed mothers, Casa Luz. Feel free to inquire as to how you can help.

#### **Facilities:**

Restaurant; bar, lounge; 2 rooftop Jacuzzis; concierge; tour desk; limited room service (6am-10pm); laundry service; free Wi-Fi

### **Grano de Oro Restaurant**

#### **Frommer's Review**

Even after a relocation, remodeling, and expansion, this elegant restaurant is set around a lovely interior courtyard of the wonderful Hotel Grano de Oro. The atmosphere here remains intimate, relaxed, and refined, all at the same time. The menu features a wide range of meat and fish dishes. The lomito piemontese is two medallions of filet mignon stuffed with Gorgonzola cheese in a sherry sauce, while the pernil de conejo is a rabbit thigh stuffed with a mushroom pâté and served with a Dijon mustard sauce. If you opt for fish, I recommend the macadamia-encrusted corvina, which is served with a light and tangy orange sauce. Be sure to save room for the "Grano de Oro pie," a decadent dessert with various layers of chocolate and coffee mousses and creams. This place has a good wine list, including a range of options by the glass. When the weather's nice, grab a table around the fountain in the courtyard, a particularly nice option for lunch.

### **Hotel Capitán Suizo**

#### **Frommer's Review**

This well-appointed beachfront hotel sits on the quiet southern end of Tamarindo. The rooms are housed in a series of two-story buildings. The lower rooms have air-conditioning and private patios; the upper units have plenty of cross ventilation, ceiling fans, and cozy balconies. All have large bathrooms and sitting rooms with fold-down futon couches. In effect, all the rooms are really suites, with separate sitting/living room areas. The spacious bungalows are spread around the shady grounds; these all come with a tub in the bathroom

and an inviting outdoor shower among the trees. The hotel's free-form pool is quite nice. The shallow end slopes in gradually, imitating a beach, and there's also a separate children's pool. Perhaps the greatest attribute here is that it's just steps from one of the calmer and more isolated sections of Playa Tamarindo, making it a good family pick.

**Facilities:**

Restaurant; bar; midsize pool and children's pool; small exercise room; tour desk; babysitting; laundry service

## **Villa Caletas**

### **Frommer's Review**

It's hard to find a luxury hotel in Costa Rica with a more spectacular setting than this. Perched 350m (1,148 ft.) above the sea, Villa Caletas enjoys commanding views of the Pacific over forested hillsides. The regular rooms are all elegantly appointed and spacious, but you'll definitely want to stay in a villa or suite here. Each individual villa is situated on a patch of hillside facing the sea or forests. Inside you'll find a main bedroom with a queen-size bed and a comfortable sitting room with couches that convert into two single beds. The villas feature white-tile floors, modern bathrooms, and a private terrace for soaking up the views. The larger junior suites come with their own outdoor Jacuzzis. The suites and master suites are larger still -- and even come with their own private swimming pools. There are only two master suites, and one is a vigorous hike downhill from the main hotel building and restaurants. The same is true of some of the villas and juniors.

Opened in 2007, **Zephyr Palace** is a new 7-suite addition, located a little bit below the main hotel and villas. The rooms here are immense and thematically designed -- you can choose from an African suite, an Arabian suite, an Oriental suite, and more. The Imperial suite has its own gym and sauna. All have beautiful ocean views, home theater systems, Jacuzzis, and private balconies.

Although most guests are happy to lounge around and swim in the free-form "infinity" pools that seem to blend into the sea below and beyond, Villa Caletas offers hourly shuttle service to its own little private beach, as well as a host of tour options. A Greek-style amphitheater hosts periodic sunset concerts of jazz or classical music.

**Facilities:**

2 restaurants; bar; 2 midsize pools w/spectacular view; spa; concierge; tour desk; beach shuttle; in-room massage; laundry service

## **Flor Blanca Resort**

### **Frommer's Review**

This intimate resort hotel is, hands down, the most luxurious option in this neck of the woods and one of the most luxurious boutique hotels in the country. The individual villas are huge, with a vast central living area opening onto a spacious veranda. The furnishings, decorations, and architecture boast a mix of Latin American and Asian influences, with some African adornments thrown in for good measure. Most overlook lush gardens, and about half have views through to the sea. Every unit features a large open-air bathroom with a garden shower and teardrop-shape tub set amid flowering tropical foliage. You can opt for either the one-bedroom villas with a four-poster king-size bed in the main bedroom, or a two-bedroom, two-bathroom villa, with two twin beds in a separate upstairs bedroom. You'll find several examples of the resort's namesake tree planted around the grounds.

The restaurant features wonderfully prepared creative fusion cuisine. There's a modern, full-service spa, as well as a full-size and active dojo on the grounds, where complimentary yoga, kickboxing, and cardio-workout classes are regularly offered. The beautiful free-form pool is on two levels, with a sculpted waterfall connecting them and a shady Indonesian-style

gazebo off to one side for lounging around in. Flor Blanca is located toward the northern end of Playa Santa Teresa.

**Facilities:**

Restaurant; bar; pool; small open-air gym; spa; watersports equipment rental; bike rental; limited room service (7am-9:30pm); laundry service

## **Peace Lodge**

### **Frommer's Review**

The rooms at this outgrowth of the popular La Paz Waterfall Gardens just might be some of the most impressive in the country -- and the bathrooms in the deluxe units easily earn that distinction. The rooms are quite large and feature sparkling wood floors and trim, handcrafted four-poster beds, beautiful stone fireplaces, intricately sculpted steel light fixtures, and a host of other creative touches and details. Every room has a private balcony fitted with a mosaic-tiled Jacuzzi. The aforementioned deluxe bathrooms come with a second oversize Jacuzzi set under a skylight in the middle of an immense room that features a full interior wall planted with ferns, orchids, and bromeliads and fed by a functioning waterfall system. Guests here have full access to all the tours and attractions of the La Paz Waterfall Gardens during normal operating hours and beyond. The lodge is located about 45 minutes from the airport and makes a good first stop if your itinerary takes you next to La Fortuna and Arenal Volcano, or to the Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí region.

**Facilities:**

Restaurant; bar; 2 outdoor swimming pools; Jacuzzi; tour desk; laundry service; free Wi-Fi

## **La Paz Waterfall Gardens**

### **Frommer's Review**

The main attraction here consists of a series of trails through primary and secondary forests alongside the La Paz River, with lookouts over a series of powerful falls, including the namesake La Paz Fall. In addition to an orchid garden and a hummingbird garden, you can see a huge butterfly garden that, in fact, they claim is the largest in the world. A small serpentarium, featuring a mix of venomous and non-venomous native snakes, and several terrariums containing various frogs and lizards, are also parts of the attraction. The newest addition is a man-made trout pond where you can cast for trout. While the admission fee is a little steep, everything is wonderfully done and the trails and waterfalls are beautiful. A buffet lunch at the large cafeteria-style restaurant costs an extra \$12 (£6). This is a good stop after a morning visit to the Poás Volcano. Plan to spend 2 to 4 hours here. The hotel rooms (Peace Lodge) are some of the nicest in the country.

## **Arenas del Mar**

### **Frommer's Review**

Finally, there's Manuel Antonio that combines the best of all worlds, direct beach access, rainforest setting and surroundings, fabulous views, and luxurious accommodations. Designed and built by the folks behind Finca Rosa Blanca, this place features 7 three-story units, with large, luxurious 1- and 2-bedroom units. Not all have ocean views, so be sure to specify if you want one. The top-floor units of the highest building (no. 7) would be my first choice. Buildings nos. 1, 2, and 3 are closest to the

beach. All rooms are very spacious, with tasteful decor, cool yellow tile floors, and plenty of wood and tile accents. Most have outdoor Jacuzzi tubs on their private balconies. The apartments are immense two-bedroom, three-bath affairs with a kitchenette, perfect for families and longer stays. The restaurant, lobby, and main pool are set on the highest point of land here, and several spots have fabulous views of Manuel Antonio's Punta Cathedral. The owners are truly concerned about the environment and promoting sustainable tourism. Very little was done to disturb the land or surrounding ecosystems during construction. Free daily yoga classes and loads of relaxing treatments can be enjoyed at the hotel's spa.

#### **Facilities:**

Restaurant; bar; snack bar; 2 small outdoor pools; spa; concierge; tour desk; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; laundry service

### **The Best Luxury Hotels in Costa Rica by Frommer's**

□ **Marriott Costa Rica Hotel** (San Antonio de Belén, San José area; tel. **888/236-2427** or 298-0844; [www.marriott.com](http://www.marriott.com)): Of all the contenders in the upscale urban market, the Marriott seems to be doing the best job. Maybe because it's the newest, but everything is in great shape, the service is bend-over-backward, the restaurants are excellent, and the hotel boasts all the facilities and amenities you could want.

□ **Peace Lodge** (north of Varablanca; tel. **482-2720** or 225-0643; [www.waterfallgardens.com](http://www.waterfallgardens.com)): While the bathrooms of the deluxe units are the most luxurious and unique in the country, everything else is done in grand style as well. Each room comes with at least one custom-tiled Jacuzzi on a private balcony. The hotel adjoins the popular La Paz Waterfall Gardens.

□ **Four Seasons Resort Costa Rica** (Papagayo Peninsula; tel. **800/819-5053** or 696-0000; [www.fourseasons.com/costarica](http://www.fourseasons.com/costarica)): This was the first major resort to really address the high-end luxury market in Costa Rica. Within its first month of operation Michael Jordan and Madonna were notable guests. A beautiful setting, wonderful installations, a world-class golf course, and stellar service continue to make this the current king of the hill in the upscale market.

□ **Hotel Punta Islita** (on the Pacific coast in central Guanacaste; tel. **231-6122**; [www.hotelpuntaislita.com](http://www.hotelpuntaislita.com)): This great getaway is perched on a high, flat bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. It's popular with honeymooners, and rightly so. The rooms are large and comfortable, the food is excellent, and the setting is stunning. If you venture beyond your room and the hotel's inviting hillside pool, there's a long, almost always deserted beach for you to explore, as well as a wealth of activities for the more adventurous.

□ **Flor Blanca Resort** (Playa Santa Teresa; tel. **640-0232**; [www.florblanca.com](http://www.florblanca.com)): The individual villas at this intimate resort are some of the largest and most luxurious in the country. The service and food are outstanding, and the location is breathtaking, spread over a lushly planted hillside steps away from Playa Santa Teresa.

□ **Villa Caletas** (north of Jacó; tel. **637-0505**; [www.hotelvillacaletas.com](http://www.hotelvillacaletas.com)): Spread out over a steep hillside high above the Pacific, these individual villas have a Mediterranean feel. The Greek Doric amphitheater follows the same motif. Carved into the hillside, the theater frequently features evening concerts of jazz or classical music. The "infinity pool" here was one of the first in Costa Rica and is still my favorite. Sitting in a lounge chair at the pool's edge, you'll swear that it joins the sea beyond.

□ **Arenas del Mar** (Manuel Antonio; tel./fax **777-2777**; [www.arenasdelmar.com](http://www.arenasdelmar.com)): With large and ample rooms, excellent service and amenities, a beautiful little spa, and the best beach access and location in Manuel Antonio, this hotel has a lot to offer.

□ **Hotel Sí Como No** (Manuel Antonio; tel. **777-0777**; [www.sicomono.com](http://www.sicomono.com)): Although there are fancier and more posh places in Costa Rica, the large modern suites and villas, spectacular views, attentive service, and first-rate facilities here earn this small resort a spot on this list.

