

# Travel with Pen and Palate

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## Villa Caletas: luxury with a conscience in Costa Rica

SUNDAY, 14 AUGUST 2016 | MARC D'ENTREMONT



*Sunset from Villa Caletas amphitheater*

Denis Roy emigrated from France with a dream somewhere in his head that materialized into creating a fantasy in Costa Rica. On over 700 acres of improbable, undeveloped coastal and mountain wilderness, using building methods that hearkened back to the days of the pyramids, the hotel, restaurants and spa complex of Villa Caletas and the Zephyr Palace emerged over time. A fusion of river stone castle and tropical Victorian architecture, the 50 rooms range from stunning to awe inspiring.



*Villa Caletas amphitheater*

Sunsets from the amphitheater are legendary and views encompass forested hills and ocean from many angles. Yet those beautiful hills required total reforestation due to cattle overgrazing. The lush peaks of today were barren, rocky and eroding into the clear Pacific below. Fifteen hundred trees were planted from the beach up the mountain, and Villa Caletas ([http://www.hotelvillacaletas.com/the\\_hotel](http://www.hotelvillacaletas.com/the_hotel)) continues to spearhead major reforestation projects in the region.

Ten percent of electricity is solar powered and all hot water is provided through a system of air conditioner heat transfer. Each room's air conditioning system uses smart

technology reducing the temperature automatically when no one is present and increasing it to a guest's pre-set comfort zone when they enter their room.



*Villas Caletas ocean front*

Twenty-five years ago this lush location had no roads, no water and no electricity. Denis had an initial concept to construct a 25 room hotel on this spectacular site with its panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean's Herradura Bay on Costa Rica's Central Coast. But cost and engineering reality limited his first venture to eight rooms. Yet Denis was not deterred.

Denis Roy is a dreamer who understands that demanding clients will pay for luxury if unique. Waking in the king size bed of my suite, room 88, a panoramic view unfolded through the expansive glass wall overlooking Herradura Bay. After a quick call to the front desk I was picked up in an electric golf cart to meet General Manager Frederick Nepveu and whisked off in a four-wheel drive car down the mountain to the beach for breakfast.



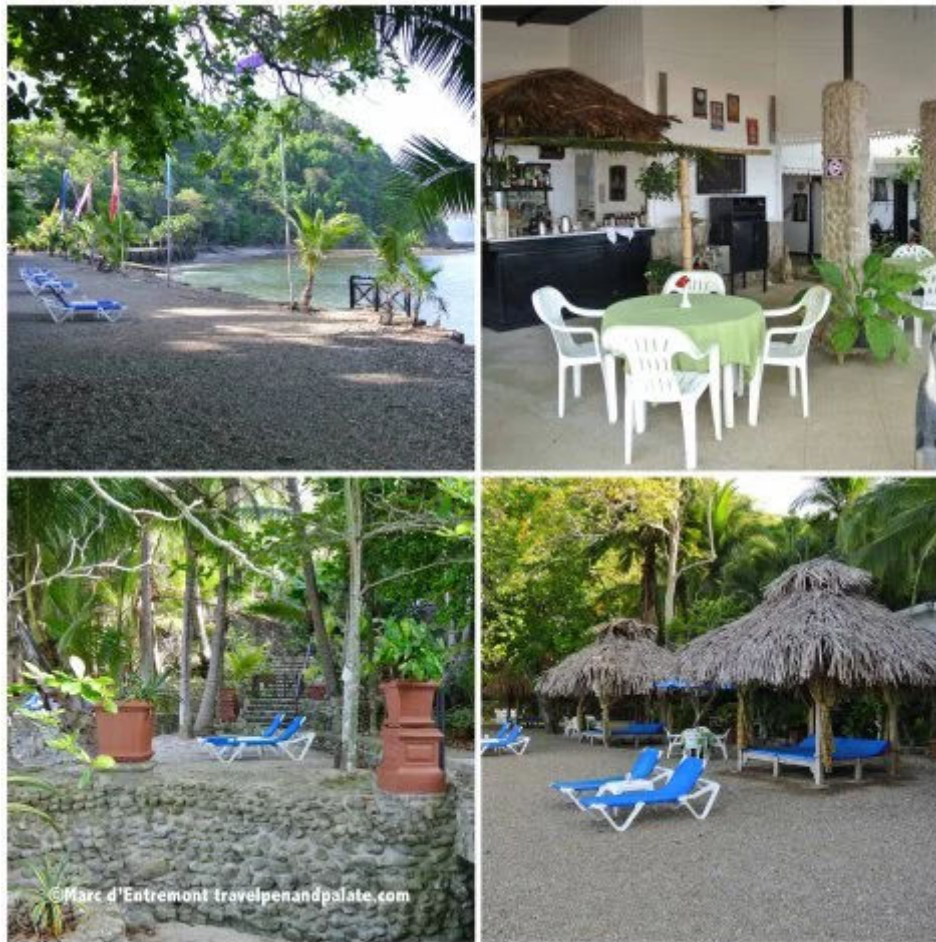
*view from suite 88*



*Villa Caletas room 88*

The slow drive down the steep hill passed Villa Caletas' hydroponic farm growing herbs and produce. No contact with soil controls pest infestation of the produce. The lush forest teemed with animals and birds in the cool of the early morning.





*El Pelicano Snack Bar on the Beach, Villa Caletas*

The beach complex offers privacy, the well designed El Pelicano Snack Bar on the Beach (<http://www.hotelvillacaletas.com/pelicano>) and an array of comfortable beach chaise lounges. The shuttle runs every 30 minutes from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Breakfast included fresh extracted organic kale juice, an artful fruit salad and a typical Costa Rican breakfast plate – gallo pinto (black beans and rice) eggs, sautéed sweet plantains, fresh avocado and a wedge of fried white cheese. The gentle lapping of Pacific Ocean waves was the only music necessary.



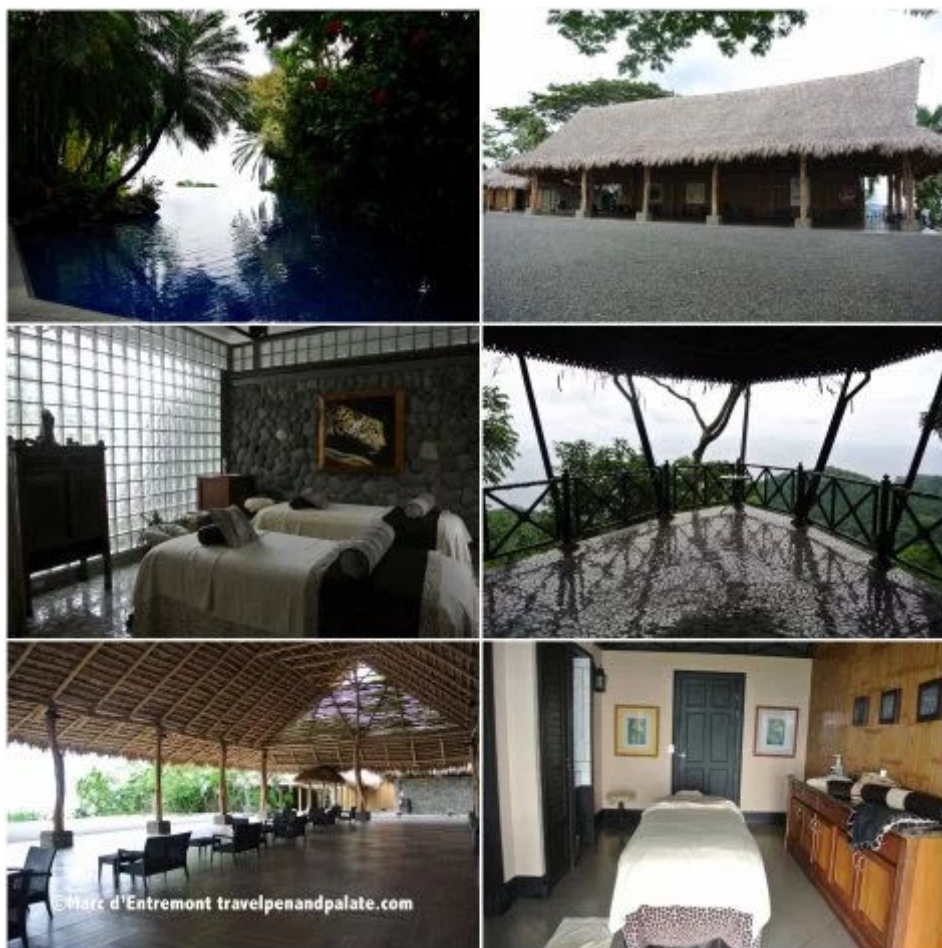
*breakfast at El Pelicano Snack Bar on the Beach, Villa Caletas*



*Mirador Restaurant, Villa Caletas*

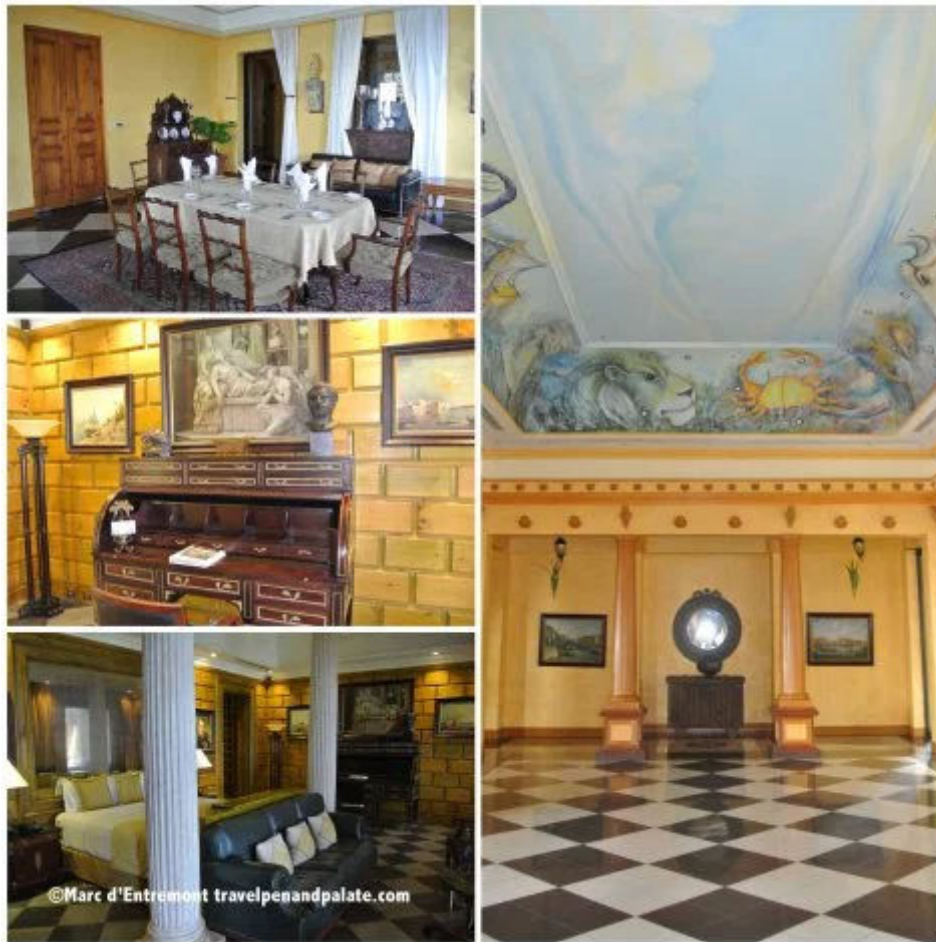
Villa Caletas is a complex of buildings set among the lush restored mountain landscape. Small Distinctive Hotels (<http://www.distinctivehotels.com/>) are not for the budget traveler, but if seeking bang for the buck, Villa Caletas delivers in spades. While river stone buildings dominate most of the complex, a graceful Victorian glass and wood filigree building with the Mirador Restaurant (<http://www.hotelvillacaletas.com/mirador>) tops a jungle of exotic plants and expansive window walls that bring the outside indoors.





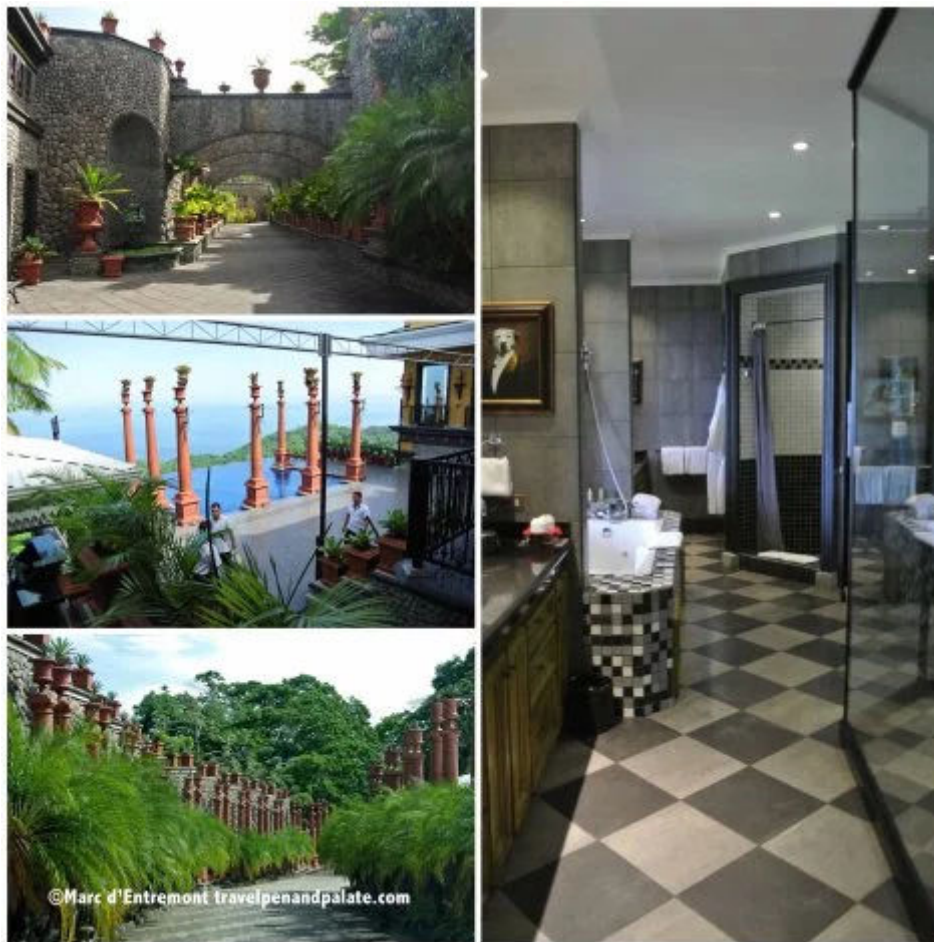
*Palapa & Serenity Spa, Villa Caletas*

A massive traditional open air palapa with hand carved wood pillars set on the edge of a cliff is dedicated to Denis' passion for yoga, yet has become popular for events up to 300 guests. The Serenity Spa (<http://www.hotelvillacaletas.com/spa>), tucked behind the palapa, is a haven of calm. Providing all the services one expects from a luxury spa, I nearly drifted off to sleep under relaxing hands, scented oils and the soft sounds of water fountains.



*The Zephyr Palace at Villa Caletas*

The Zephyr Palace (<http://www.zephyrpalace.com/>) is the crown jewel of this luxe property. Seven massive individually designed and decorated suites (<http://www.zephyrpalace.com/suites>) provide luxury befitting a palace. Private dining rooms, hand painted ceilings, in room exercise equipment, hand crafted furniture, exotic woods, marble tiles, original art, private infinity pools and televisions that slide into the foot of king size beds at the touch of a button are among just a few of the luxuries in the Zephyr Palace. On the day of my visit the suites were fully booked by a wedding party, not an uncommon occurrence.



*Zephyr Palace at Villa Caletas*

Providing an atmosphere of effortless comfort requires attention to detail from the eyes and hands of dedicated employees. Many of the managers live on site, including Denis Roy and general manager Frederick Nepveu. Over 150 employees, including 20 gardeners, maintain the 50 room Villa Caletas/Zephyr Palace complex.

For a culinary travel journalist Denis Roy, Frederick Nepveu, Chef Fernando Adaniz and food and beverage manager Pablo Lombardo oversee a cuisine that matches the style of Villa Caletas. Lunch started with a trio of ceviche: mango, sea snails and fish paired with a light and lemony chardonnay. Grilled rare yellow fin tuna was accompanied by a timbal of yucca and napped with pipian sauce – roasted pumpkin seeds. A salad included flor de Itavo (yucca) leaves that taste like artichoke hearts. Dessert was a light and cooling sorbet of nancy mirabelle plum.



*wine & ceviche, Anfiteatro Bar and Restaurant, Villa Caletas*





Save

*Lunch at Anfiteatro Bar and Restaurant, Villa Caletas*



*Sunset cocktail at Villa Caletas*

Pre dinner drinks at sunset commenced with an orange martini cocktail created especially for me. A long peel of orange rind twisted around the stem of the glass and dipped into the fragrant drink. Its color mimicked the setting sun's display. The steep Greek inspired Villa Caletas amphitheater adjacent to the open-air Anfiteatro Bar and Restaurant

(<http://www.hotelvillacaletas.com/anfiteatro>) is a local destination for observing beautiful sunsets for which Costa Rica has a well deserved reputation. Soft ambient music added to the charm.

Segueing to a cliff side table Chef Fernando Adaniz opened dinner with an amuse bouche of avocado and salmon with *crème fraîche* on toast. Seafood terrine of lobster, shrimp and mussels with chipotle mayonnaise was followed by an entrée of red snapper rolled around lobster. It was napped with a light egg and mustard seed

sauce. A smooth pinot grigio with citrus hints tied together this dinner of fresh seafood.



*Dinner at Anfiteatro Bar and Restaurant , Villa Caletas*

Befitting a luxe hotel dinner, dessert was preceded by a mouth cleansing sorbet of passion fruit. Dessert was an appropriately dense chocolate cake garnished with strawberry and kiwi sauce and cubes of fresh pineapple, papaya and watermelon. Did you know that Costa Rica is the world's largest grower of pineapples? Villa Caletas, naturally, makes all its breads, pastries and desserts in house. Food and beverage manager Pablo Lombardo's Mexican roots shined when he presented an after dinner tasting of smooth premium tequilas.





*Dinner at Anfiteatro Bar and Restaurant , Villa Caletas*

I had to remind myself that with the gentle evening breeze and lush vegetation surrounding all that it was not long ago that this site was a barren wasteland. That's why the many infinity pools dotting Villa Caletas become a metaphor for the group of Small Distinctive Hotel owners, managers and chefs this travel journalist interviewed during an eight-day tour – the visions they conjure gazing into infinity. Villa Caletas and Small Distinctive Hotels of Costa Rica provide luxury with a conscience transforming what we destroy into what we desire.





*Frederick Nepveu, GM, Chef Fernando Adaniz &  
Denis Roy, owner/founder Villa Caletas & Zephyr Palace*

**When you go:** Juan Santamaría International Airport (SJO

(<http://www.govisitcostarica.com/region/city.asp?cID=407>) is served by many airlines worldwide and is within an easy 20 minute drive of downtown San Jose. Hotel Villa Caletas on the Central Pacific Coast region of Puntarenas is an hour and fifteen-minute drive from Juan Santamaría International Airport.

**Disclaimer:** The author was a guest of Hotel Villas Caletas (<http://www.hotelvillacaletas.com/location>), Small Distinctive Hotels (<http://www.distinctivehotels.com/>), ENroute Communications (<http://enroutecommunications.com/>) and Revista Ander de Viaje (<http://www.revistaandar.com/inicio/>). Special thanks to my guide throughout my stay in Costa Rica Mauricio Aymerich, director Small Distinctive Hotels. Transportation within Costa Rica was provided by Toyota Rent a Car of San Jose (<https://toyotarent.com/>). A Rav4 made Costa Rica's mountain roads, especially the few unpaved, safe and comfortable.



*An infinity pool view, Villa Caletas*

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