

TRAVEL + LEISURE

Double
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DESTINATION OF THE YEAR





Paradise Found

Five innovative retreats in Costa Rica put the country's natural wonders front and center.

By Jennifer Flowers

▲ The three-bedroom Villa Vertigo at Costa Rica's Origins Lodge looks out over the cloud forest.

JUST HOURS after landing in Costa Rica, I found myself on a shaded yoga platform at **Origins Lodge** (originslodge.com; villas from \$910), in the cloud forest of the country's north. As my teacher, Manuel Guevara, guided me through downward dog and warrior poses, I began to notice the drama unfolding around me. Blue skies morphed into clouds, then rain, and the soft beat of distant thunder; then just minutes later, the sun returned.

Lime-green parrots darted past, a yellow-breasted toucan emerged from the tree line, and tiny poison-dart frogs chirped from hidden corners of the jungle. As I focused on this swirl of life, my jumble of anxieties—travel logistics, looming deadlines, family obligations—seemed to vanish as quickly as the rain.

Costa Rica is home to 6 percent of the world's biodiversity, and with each passing day at Origins I found more comfort in the multisensory orchestra of howler monkeys, birds, and amphibians that seemed to surround me at all times. Composed of six hillside lodges and the three-bedroom Villa Vertigo, Origins—one of the newest additions to the South Africa-based Mantis resort collection—ensures that guests are fully immersed in the environment.

While ensconced in my large villa, with its high bamboo ceilings and white-curtained canopy bed, I was cooled by the abundant breezes—no air-conditioning necessary. In my volcanic-stone outdoor shower, I washed with bath products made on the property from fragrant ylang-ylang flowers. After a guided nature walk

COURTESY OF ORIGINS LODGE



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Clockwise from above: The menu at Origins's open-air El Salto restaurant was designed by award-winning French chef Jean-Luc L'Hourre; Hacienda Barrigona, on Costa Rica's Pacific coast; a safari tent at Zunya; Zunya offers plant-based meals like "tuna" nigiri made with marinated watermelon, nori, and rice.



where we spotted fresh ocelot tracks, I spent an afternoon on my veranda next to a private plunge pool that was heated by a nearby woodstove, taking in views that stretched all the way to neighboring Nicaragua. The coffee I drank at breakfast came from a local producer, and every meal at El Salto restaurant contained ingredients grown on site—like castana, a type of chestnut, and arazá, a fruit used in juices and marmalades.

Costa Rica has long been a global leader in sustainable tourism, so it's no surprise that four boutique hotels sharing Origins's ethos have recently opened there. About a hundred miles south, in the Pérez Zeledón mountains, sits **Hacienda AltaGracia, Auberge Resorts Collection** (aubergeresorts.com; casitas from \$1,550). The retreat—composed of one- and two-bedroom casitas designed by New York-based Nina Gotlieb—has on-site naturalists who lead expeditions to nearby trails, rivers, and coffee farms. The hotel is also the site of the first non-U.S. outpost of holistic wellness brand the Well; guests can indulge in therapies inspired by local

healing traditions. To the west, along the Nicoya Peninsula on the Pacific Ocean, the 10-room **Hacienda Barrigona** (haciendabarrigona.com; doubles from \$395) is set within three villas on more than 500 acres. Guests can hit the waves, paddle through mangroves, or go diving at the property's secluded beach.

Also on the Nicoya Peninsula, near Santa Teresa, **Zunya** (zunya.com; tents from \$95, casitas from \$330) holds wellness retreats during which guests stay in sustainably built casitas or canvas tents; activities include contributing to permaculture projects or helping clean up nearby beaches and rivers. Close to Panama on the Golfo Dulce, **Cielo Lodge** (cielolodge.com; suites from \$970) has large stilted suites that run on hydro and solar power. The resort is partnering with the government to preserve rain forest on its property, and guests can experience that work firsthand on guided walks.