

Life on Vacation

A weekly look at the second-home market

Guanacaste, Costa Rica

Living abroad never looked so good

By Larry Olmsted
Special for USA TODAY

Costa Rica has been one of the most popular retirement destinations for Americans abroad, and it has boomed as a choice for second homes. No province is as hot for part-timers as Guanacaste on the northwest Pacific coast.

"Costa Rica's appeal as a second-home destination is even greater today: For the first time since real estate began skyrocketing five or six years ago, prices have softened," says Barry Golson, author of *Retirement Without Borders: How to Retire Abroad*. "With gorgeous jungle, mountain and beach landscapes, Costa Rica continues to set the tourism pace in Central America."

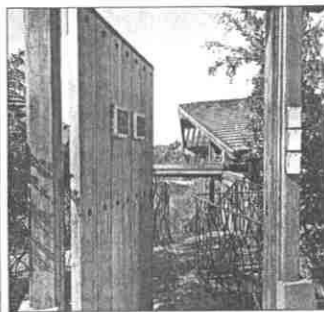
Costa Rica put eco- and adventure tourism on the map, and Guanacaste is home to 98% of the world's rare dry tropical forest. It sits in the hurricane-free zone, and has mostly 1 dry, sunny days from November to April.

It is also home to Arenal, a large man-made lake (the volcano of that name is in Alajuela province), and the pink sand beach Conchal. Outdoor adventure is a big attraction, especially surfing, sportfishing and, increasingly, golf. The Pan American Highway passes through its center, and air travel is easy to Liberia, the provincial capital. "When I came six years ago, there were three direct U.S. flights a week. Now there are more than 50," says Luis Argote, general manager of the Four Seasons Resort Costa Rica at Peninsula Papagayo.

Though many retirees and expat employees live in Liberia, virtually all vacation ownership property is on the coast. Throughout Guanacaste, the cost of living is low, as are taxes. "For many buyers, property taxes are less per year than they pay per month at home, like \$3,000 a year on a \$2 million home," says real estate agent Steve Grubba of Peninsula Papagayo.

Three Guanacaste neighborhoods

- **Peninsula Papagayo:** The country's highest profile development spans 2,300 acres with 15 miles of coastline and will be home to several resorts, golf courses, leisure facilities and residential communities. Right now there is a Four Seasons hotel with its own residences (from \$2.65 million), a wide array of lots for \$600,000-\$3 million, one golf course and more than 300 marina condos (some still under construction) from \$250,000. The peninsula is surrounded by Santa Rosa National Park.
- **Tamarindo:** This small former fishing village has long been a tourist magnet popular with surfers. It boasts three beaches and is filled with restaurants and hotels. It is also home to the Tamarindo National Wildlife Refuge, where visitors from around the world come to watch (supervised) leatherback turtles lay eggs. Lots near the beach begin in the low \$60,000s and new construction homes from just over \$100,000. At the same time, new luxury high-rise condominiums fetch about \$500,000.
- **Playas Flamingo & Potrero:** These twin beaches form a rustic but popular second- and year-round-home community. Flamingo is more heavily developed with luxury hilltop homes overlooking the sea, plus hotels, restaurants and a casino. Potrero is quiet and secluded with a small village and more modest homes. New homes in gated Potrero communities begin at \$150,000, while Flamingo commands upward of \$300,000. In both, condominiums begin at slightly lower prices.

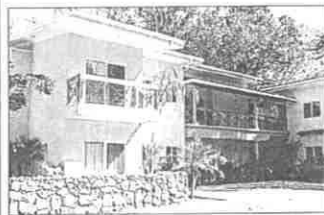


By Marco Corselli

On the market: This villa at the Four Seasons Resort in Peninsula Papagayo enjoys all the hotel amenities and boasts "green" design and construction. It was designed by renowned architect Ronald Zuercher.

High price **\$2,975,000**

- **Bedrooms:** 3
- **Bathrooms:** 3½
- **Size:** 2,700 square feet
- **Features:** Built in a compound style, with separate buildings on either side of pool. One has a master suite, kitchen, living room, laundry room and indoor and outdoor dining rooms, the other has two bedrooms. Multiple terraces with ocean views and Wi-Fi. Fully furnished, including housewares and plasma TVs.



Guanacaste Costa Rican Real Estate

On the market: This brand-new condo is two blocks from the beach in Playa Potrero.

Low price **\$125,000**

- **Bedrooms:** 1
- **Bathrooms:** 1
- **Size:** 700 square feet
- **Features:** Modern kitchen with stainless-steel appliances and granite counters, A/C, laundry room, large terrace. Shared facilities include pool, barbecue area, 24-hour security.



By Michael C. Alderwood

Peninsula Papagayo: Guanacaste is Costa Rica's driest province and outside the hurricane zone, which makes it ideal for vacation homes.



Best for

Surfers, beach fans, eco-enthusiasts.

Claim to fame

Constitutionally abolished its military in 1949. Provides free, high-quality education.

Don't miss

Weekend fiestas, small-town fairs with bull-riding, held in virtually every Guanacaste town throughout summer.

Getting there

The Liberia airport is 30-45 minutes to most of the coast with non-stop flights from Houston, Miami, Atlanta, Charlotte and Newark.

Tourism information

visitcostarica.com