

## A Bevy of Luxury Resorts Is About to Transform This Quiet Costa Rica Province

A Waldorf, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, a Six Senses, and more than a dozen others are transforming the nation's once sleepy Gold Coast into a scene out of St. Tropez.

By MELINDA FULMER



Courtesy of Nekajui, a Ritz Carlton Reserve Hotel and Residences

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When Chris Ingham Brooke, a digital publishing entrepreneur, first came to Nosara, Costa Rica in 2016 it was just a sleepy little surf town, with one main drag and jungle stretching to the sand.

During the pandemic, that began to change. The Costa Rican government doubled its investment in fiber optics, and a rush of remote workers from the U.S. and Canada followed. Private coworking clubs, cold plunge studios, boutiques, and restaurants serving acai bowls and blue spirulina lattes opened. When Brooke came back five years later in 2021 with his family, he was amazed at just how much the city, with its gravel roads, howler monkeys, and mom-and-pop shops had changed.

“It had become really vibrant and interesting,” he said. Still, there weren’t many options when it came to luxury family-friendly accommodations.



The sleepy coastline of Nosara is experiencing a luxury development boom.

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He bought a commercial lot and three years later, in March, opened Silvestre—a boutique resort with nine, 1,000-square-foot residences, a rooftop bar, a yoga studio, and a surf “concierge.” Located steps from the beach path to Playa Guiones, Silvestre sits on one of the most consistent surf breaks in the world.

Silvestre isn’t alone. Now, a bevy of new luxury properties are opening this year in the province of Guanacaste, the popular dry-zone province on Costa Rica’s Pacific-fronting Gold Coast. New resorts from Ritz Carlton and Waldorf-Astoria will open at the end of the year, two full decades after the area’s top resort, the Four Seasons, planted its flag on the Papagayo Peninsula. Luxury real estate sales and development is the other force reshaping Guanacaste and the area 45 minutes south known as Las Catalinas — a car-free development with a time zone that syncs up with the U.S. Villas here range from a couple million to about \$10 million.

International visitors to Costa Rica jumped 17 percent last year from 2022, and the number of visitors this January was up 59 percent from January 2023 with new direct flights being added from Los Angeles, Chicago, Denver, Minneapolis, and Houston, according to the Costa Rican Tourism Board.

“The beach is seconds from my office,” says Renae Johnson, director of marketing for Las Catalinas. “I can take a 15-minute coffee break and put my toes in the sand. *That* is the new luxury.”

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Last month Silvestre, a boutique resort with nine, 1,000-square-foot residences opened in the area.  
*Courtesy of Silvestre*

While Costa Rica's draw is not its amenities or nightlife (although they are improving), the year-round warm weather makes it a polestar for outdoors addicts, with perfect conditions for surfing, snorkeling, hiking, and mountain biking. The jet set here are more likely to gather to watch sunsets than disco. It's much-touted Blue Zone wellness culture and unspoiled beaches and forests are bait for chakras that are better aligned.

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# What's coming to Guanacaste



The [Waldorf Astoria](#) is set to open next year. *Courtesy of Waldorf Astoria*

An incredible 18 properties are slated to open by 2025, including two new luxury properties that will hit the market at the end of this year: Nekajui, a Ritz Carlton Reserve Hotel and Residences and Waldorf Astoria Costa Rica Punta Cacique. A Six Senses Resort and Spa Papagayo is expected to open in late 2025.

The Waldorf Astoria, located 30 minutes from the Liberia Airport, will have 188 guest rooms and suites and 41 residences built into the hillside with its own sandy beach, signature restaurants, cenote-themed spa, teen center, and kids club, including eco-tourism experiences in the surrounding area.

“We won’t just take care of the kids at the club, we will help them experience different things about the country,” said Valeria Nowotny, vice president of operations for Hilton’s resorts in the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central America. “Visitors here are looking for a nature experience, mixed with a little local culture.”

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Ritz Carlton's Nekajui (which translates to "garden" in the local Chorotega dialect)—located on Papagayo Peninsula, close to the Four Seasons and Andaz resorts—will add 107 new rooms, including 30 suites and three glamping tents. Another 36 for-sale residences, inspired by Mediterranean villas, overlooking Playa Pochote have hit the market here—with one estate asking just under \$15 million. Meanwhile, visitors can take a funicular down to the beach club, check out its hanging bridge and pools, hidden speakeasy, coffee and cacao bar, and indoor/outdoor spa with wellness studio and hydrotherapy area.

For luxury travelers that have struggled to find a resort in the right location with the right amenities and polish, these properties will provide new reasons to return to Guanacaste, with expanding infrastructure and more paved roads making it easier to get from place

And, despite the construction boom in the Papagayo Peninsula, the área is unlikely to be overbuilt anytime soon, thanks to the vast Área de Conservación Guanacaste (ACG), a UNESCO World Heritage site protecting wildlife on 400,000 acres from the shore of the Pacific surrounding these hotels to the lowland rainforests in the Caribbean basin. And while many locals complain that the nearby city of Tamarindo is becoming more like Cancun, there are limits to access on water rights to restrict development here and across Costa Rica, said Wagner Loria, an agent with Keller Williams Tamarindo. Further south, in Nosara there are also protections that keep developers from building directly on the beach, leaving views pristine. "There's a very powerful community here that's very protective of the town," said Brooke. "When you look back from the beach, all you can see is jungle. That makes it a very special place."