

Travel

New Guesthouses Offer ‘Barefoot Luxury’ on Southern Caribbean Coast

By Meagan Robertson

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The new Geckoes Lodge on the southern Caribbean coast is a place to sit back, relax and leave your watch behind. About a kilometer inland from the beach on Cocles' Margarita Road, a gorgeous expanse of unspoiled jungle holds four houses: two for guests, one for the full-time staff and one belonging to owners Zoë Courtier and Tom Keller.

Courtier, from England, and Keller, from the Netherlands, came to Costa Rica three years ago looking for the perfect place to open a lodge. They had worked in tourism for years and, after considering numerous other countries, they decided on Costa Rica for its good economy, steady tourism and political stability.

Geckoes Lodge's slogan is “barefoot luxury,” evoking a place where guests can experience comfort in an unspoiled atmosphere. The grounds are by no means perfectly manicured, but the beautiful disarray of natural plants, trees and wildlife makes the setting enchanting.



Casa del Bosque master bedroom.

Nick Coté | Tico Times

Here, the peace is broken only by birdcalls, the sounds of chirping insects and a running stream and the soft padding of three dogs trotting to greet their owners. A path leads down to the stream, where fortunate visitors may catch glimpses of poison dart frogs, hummingbirds or even a sloth hanging from the branches.

In contrast to the somewhat wild outdoor area, the houses are impeccable. The covered but open-air living and kitchen areas offer guests the experience of walking in and still feeling as though they're outside. Though the bedrooms are enclosed, once the wooden shutters of the numerous large windows are thrown open, the rooms seem to become part of the surrounding nature.

Both spacious guesthouses are constructed of unfinished wood and have fully equipped kitchens, private plunge pools, large bathrooms with hot showers and gorgeously painted porcelain sinks, and unique wood furniture, mostly made by local craftsmen. The larger guesthouse, Casa Bromelia, has one master bedroom with queen-size bed and a second room with two single beds. The slightly smaller Casa del Bosque is geared more toward honeymooners, with one large master bedroom with queen bed.

Unpredictable weather is a part of life on the Caribbean, and, when it rains, the size of the guesthouses at Geckoes Lodge makes a huge difference.

“It does rain here, and if you're stuck in a small hotel room or something, you might feel trapped,” Keller says. “Here, you have your own space.”

Though just four kilometers from the town of Puerto Viejo, Geckoes Lodge seems farther.



Casa Bromelia exterior.

Nick Coté | Tico Times



Geckoes Lodge owners Zoë Courtier and Tom Keller with companion Fred.

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“You imagine in this environment that you're miles from anywhere,” Courtier says. “But in truth, you're not.”

They do recommend that guests have rental cars for the convenience of being able to drive to town, the beaches and other area attractions. Puerto Viejo has a rental car agency for those who would prefer not to drive from San José, as well as bicycles and scooters for rent – ideal for cruising along the beach-studded road south to Manzanillo.

Courtier and Keller are more than willing to organize tours, such as a chocolate tour, zipline through the jungle, guided waterfall hike or dolphin-watching trip, for their guests. They seem to have achieved their goal of creating a lodge where guests can kick off their sandals and relax to the sounds of nature at the end of a day's adventures.

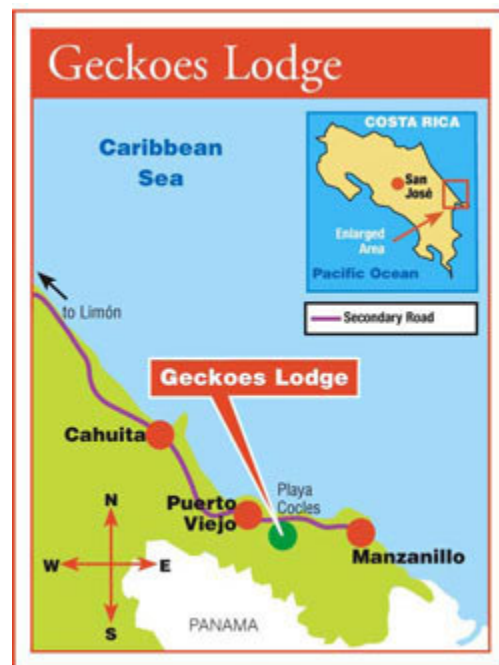
“So many people live on a time schedule where they could never forget their watch,” Courtier says. “This is a place where we want you to leave your watch behind and be able to say, ‘This is my time.’”

Getting There, Rates, Info

From Puerto Viejo, go south three kilometers, pass Río Negro and turn right onto Margarita Road. Head inland just over a kilometer until you see on your right a large purple wall with a wooden gate and two geckoes carved into it.

The one-bedroom Casa del Bosque rents for \$220 a night, while the two-bedroom Casa Bromelia goes for \$275 a night, including tax. If you stay a week, you get seven nights for the price of five.

For information and reservations, call 8335-5849 or 8997-0563, e-mail info@geckoeslodge.com or visit www.geckoeslodge.com.



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