



Nicoya Peninsula

Then Nicoya Peninsula is quickly becoming the new tourism burst for Costa Rica. The extreme tourists have been uncovering the secret gems of Nicoya for approximately 15 yrs and now the path is well paved to these Pacific Coast wonders...well, not exactly "well" paved. The reality is that the level of tourism for the Nicoya peninsula is plagued by some of the most horrendous roads and bridges you've ever seen. In fact, in most instances, it is better to drive off of the road than on the road. Keep this in mind when choosing a vehicle at the rental agency (and don't forget the full coverage insurance, either). The government of Costa Rica has been promising to repair the roads in Nicoya since the first path was cleared with a machete...but there has been little evidence of that in the past. However, there are more recent signs of improvement and they seem to be at the hands of the new presidential party who claim to be making great strides in Nicoya's infrastructure... and believe that every tourist, citizen, strut and tire are praying for their delivery. This recently discovered territory is home to some of the most diverse conditions found in Costa Rica. Some of Central America's most pristine beaches are found around the peninsula as well as world renown surfing spots all along the Pacific seaboard. The rough, mountainous coastline gives home to many private coves and bays which create calm waters and low wakes similar to a Caribbean feel. Nicoya is extremely lush in areas while other parts are filled with cacti. It is difficult to believe the diversity here. The mountains, meadows, marshes and lowland areas are consistent with the central valley and the wildlife is so abundant that if you put one more monkey in a tree in Tambor one would fall out in Montezuma. Nicoya and Costa Rica is just one of those places that you find that is so spectacular that a 12 point font just can't express it. Enjoy Nicoya! Take pictures! Take it slow! Drive Slow! And remember, this is the Simple life executed to perfection...take ten deep breaths and enjoy it.

Paquera

When the ferry from Puntarenas finally reaches its destination across the channel, it is the friendly town of Paquera that is first to welcome you. Strategically, Paquera is a wise destination to recognize for travelers meandering through the country and investors alike.

Reasons being, Paquera has one of the only two gas stations in the southern Nicoya peninsula. If you're traveling from Puntarenas with your vehicle you may want to top of your tank while in Paquera. You never know where your adventures may take you and worrying about running out of gas shouldn't be another issue on your plate.

Paquera is, by all accounts, a standard little town in Costa Rica. The streets are littered with small restaurants and soda shops and the town carries all of your basic needs. Most everyday items can be found in the "Ferreteria" or Hardware store. Day to day life in Costa Rica is very simple and Paquera exemplifies that very statement. You won't find any traffic lights, garbage trucks or sirens. You may find yourself waiting for the Ox cart to pass on your way through town but that would be about it. Unless you intentionally make a stop, it is possible that you will miss Paquera with a blink of an eye, as they say but nonetheless, the longer you linger the more you'll feel the charm of this tiny port city. By traveling west through Paquera you will find Vainilla, Pochote, Tambor, Cobano, Mal Pais and Santa Teresa. By traveling north through Paquera you will find Playa Gigante, Playa Naranjo and Jicarel.

Vainilla

Tucked away in the mountains that skirt Bahia Ballena (Whale's Bay) you'll find Vainilla. Actually, unless you're really looking for Vainilla, you probably won't find it at all. If traveling from Paquera to Tambor and you miss an obvious left turn, then you might end up in Vainilla. Vainilla is a small pueblo mostly known for their soccer tournaments (Futbol down here) and their yearly festival. Located roughly 5 minutes from Tambor and 2 minutes from Pochote, Vainilla is a fantastic town to explore by horseback. They could take a picture of Vainilla and stick it on a postcard with the catch phrase, "Peaceful Costa Rican Pueblo" and that would sum it up nicely. There is one local store here in Vainilla and that pretty well sums up the commercial side of things. Surrounded by large farms and beautiful mountains, Vainilla is definitely worth the trip for those interested in relaxing day of exploring. If you want to go out and really not find anything (and ensure that no one will find you) take a few hours in the little town of Vainilla...it'll be well worth it.

Pochote

Pochote is another small pueblo on the northern corner of Bahia Ballena. The main difference from Pochote and other small Pueblos of Costa Rica is that Pochote is actually on the water. Home to many fisherman and beach goers alike, Pochote is a great little place to have a drink on the beach. Here in Pochote, the ocean forms an estuary which drastically changes the local flora and fauna. In some parts, Pochote turns to a near swamp-like environment catering to several wild species of birds, fish and wild flowers. Most boating tours and horseback tours start, stop or finish in Pochote. If you're staying in Tambor, odds are you'll end up having dinner or a cocktail on the beach in Pochote but you may not even know it.

Tambor

Tambor is the prominent fishing village located centrally in Bahia Ballena. This gorgeous, quaint little town is fully embraced by the majestic beaches of the bay. If staying in Tambor it would be very difficult to avoid being on the beach at some point in your trip. With the calm, Caribbean-like waters of the bay to the east and the droves of Howler monkeys in the mountains and jungle canopy above, it is no wonder that Tambor quickly becomes a favorite. There are many activities to keep you outdoors in Tambor; tennis, horseback riding, swimming, golfing, hiking, fishing, waterfalls, power gliding, eating, drinking...I think you get my point. When staying in Tambor, make sure you check out the dance night on Thursday nights. Tambor is famous for its Thursday night parties on the beach and it attracts visitors from all neighboring towns and villages. It is a different venue than what you're probably used to but be prepared for lots of drinks, local music and incredible dancing. Tambor also boasts the luxurious Playa Tambor Barcelo resort. This all-inclusive resort takes full advantage of Bahia Bellena giving its patrons unlimited access to the beach, the sun and all the activities in the surrounding areas. Another reason that Tambor is quickly becoming a favorite is due to the airport located here. There are currently 6 flights to San Jose each day. A trip to San Jose can take you about 25 minutes and will usually cost you less than \$70. They do tend to charge you for any extra weight you may be bringing along, and I'm not saying it's ridiculous, but you may want to leave behind your travel pack of facial tissues. Tambor is thought to be more laid back than other small towns you'll find but the richness of beauty and its people make it one of the most desirable pueblos on the peninsula.

Panica

Panica is a small town which runs parallel to the Panica River. This agrarian community is set just off the main road in Tambor. Although off the beaten path, Panica has all the standard amenities found in most pueblos; grocery stores, restaurants, hardware stores, etc. The one thing you won't find is alcohol. Panica is a dry pueblo, so be prepared to import all of your alcoholic refreshments from Tambor. This process takes approximately 3 minutes. No need to worry or have a pre-fiesta heart attack. The natural splendor in Panica is primarily what Panica has to offer. Monkeys and other picture-sought animals are abundant and you can listen to their daily rituals from just about any point in Panica. If you're a horse lover then Panica is especially for you. Most homes have stables instead of driveways and Horse-whisperers from all over the world could learn a thing or two about horses from the average 10 year old citizen of Panica.

Cobano

If anyone could characterize a single town in Nicoya's Southern Peninsula as being a "City", I suppose Cobano would be the closest. Realistically, Cobano is a transportation hub. Cobano offers a slew of stores that will pretty much have almost everything you thought you really needed...maybe not exactly what you needed but you may just find a good compromise or substitute. You can purchase everything from shoes, food, computers, car parts, real estate, welding supplies, fertilizer, stuff for your pets and even a washer and dryer but you may not find an eye glass kit. Cobano does have the only

bank in Southern Nicoya. It is best to use your ATM card if you have one because if you go into the bank plan to spend your entire day there. Also, Cobano is a great place to catch a bus. Nearly every bus going anywhere stops in Cobano. Cobano, too, is a great place to fill up your tank. The only other gas station you'll really see is in Paquera. You may find a few guys in other small towns offering gasoline in old bleach bottles...but in Cobano there is a "real" gas station. There are a couple of Pharmacies in the area which are great and there is a health clinic there, as well. Within a few passes of Cobano you pretty much memorize all that is offered and you realize if Cobano is the place for you to shop or if it's time you travel to Puntarenas (which is the nearest "real" city across the channel).

Montezuma

Montezuma is a really unique little ocean-side town. From its remoteness and small size spurts this great, little, artsy, Bohemian-type village. Somehow, as if magically, the essence of the Caribbean finds its way to Montezuma, too. There are a great many local shops to buy some really original trinkets, clothes and gifts. Too, many locals come to Montezuma for the vast choices in restaurants and clubs. Many types of cuisines are offered in Montezuma and many are sea-side cafes. You can find Italian, Mediterranean, State-side, Thai, BBQ and of course local dishes...usually caught just outside Montezuma. Montezuma's largest attraction, however, is the waterfalls. Tourists and locals, alike, travel many miles to sit beneath these magnificent waterfalls. Located just a couple of blocks from the center of town, these falls are easy to get to and well worth the film footage. There are several hotels in Montezuma and plenty of things to do. The Costa Rican Standard is available; Horseback riding, sun worshipping, hiking, ATV rentals, swimming, surfing (although a rocky reef keeps most amateurs from the surf), animal watching and lounging. Montezuma is nearly imbedded in the mountain side any distance walked away from the beach is bound to give great photo opportunities for the casual photographers and professional ones as well. Also, if you're searching the country over for a great Zip Line Canopy Tour, look no further than Montezuma. The zip line here is fantastic and is one of the only zip lines that allow you to take a break and swim in the waterfalls!

Cabuya

Cabuya is probably one of the most quaint villages in Nicoya. Sitting along the coast, just moments away from Montezuma, Cabuya hosts the Cabo Blanco National Park Reserve. Being the home to the national park has long since been the main attraction of Cabuya but lately, with the new road improvements allowing you to travel easily to Mal Pais, Cabuya is seeing a new breath of tourism. Cabuya is really the missing link to the southern tip. Surrounded by breath-taking beauty, Cabuya is now being heavily sought after as the relaxed paradise for which Costa Rica was original known. There are a few hotels and restaurants in Cabuya but most of your needs will still be found in either Mal Pais/Santa Teresa or Montezuma. Still located 20 minutes from Cobano, Cabuya may have a lot to offer in the future as the next premiere resort town.

Mal Pais

Mal Pais, meaning “Bad Country” is synonymous with surfing in Costa Rica. The famous break of Mal Pais has been sought after for years and now experienced yearly by the droves of surfers looking for the perfect wave. Mal Pais hosts some of the most amazing coastline view in Costa Rica. Mal Pais really doesn't have a town center, per se but instead, has a long coastal road that is just sufficient enough to get you from one surf spot to the next. Mal Pais does have a Canopy Tour Zip Line available if you're looking for an excuse to fly through the jungle above and the Costa Rican jungle there still produces all the parrots and animals for your gazing pleasure, including the famed Howler Monkey.

Santa Teresa

Santa Teresa could be defined as the downtown of Mal Pais because both towns share the same road. When you enter Mal Pais and Santa Teresa there is an intersection which indicates the borders from one city to the next. Most visitors can't distinguish between Mal Pais and Santa Teresa but an easy rule of thumb is if it's “Left” it's Mal Pais and if it's “Right”, it's Santa Teresa. Santa Teresa has a very eclectic populous ranging from different areas of Europe, Africa, Israel, South America and the United States. There is a great assortment of restaurants and cafés in Santa Teresa. Some are located along the beach while others take advantage of the mountainous coastlines, giving some of the finest views of the white sand beaches below. Some would argue that the surf in Santa Teresa is better than that found in Mal Pais but the two cities share the same coastline. There are several surf and board shops in Santa Teresa and surfing being the top priority, you'll find many opportunities for lessons to learn this great sport if you're new or just get some tips to polish your skills if you're more advanced. Also, the nightlife in Mal Pais/Santa Teresa is probably one of the most active on the peninsula. There are tons of things to do on nearly every night of the week and most parties will include bon fires on the beach and music until dawn. Many celebrities frequent Santa Teresa to let loose and enjoy their anonymity but a few are being caught and these instances of fame are really putting Santa Teresa on the map. There is no bank in Santa Teresa yet but there is an ATM that you can use (assuming it's working) for quite a hefty fee...but what choice do you have, really? Overall, Santa Teresa may seem like a difficult little paradise to reach but once you've found it, you'll probably put it on your favorites list.

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