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The Jungle Has an Ocean View at Río Magnolia

By Meg Yamamoto
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They say Canadians are nice. In the case of John and Maureen Paterson of Río Magnolia Lodge, it couldn't be truer. The Ontario couple have built a beacon of hospitality on a hilltop in the Fila Costeña mountains, between the crossroads town of San Isidro de El General and Playa Dominical on the southern Pacific coast.



Río Magnolia Lodge: main house.

Meg Yamamoto | Tico Times

The Patersons, both engineers, moved to Costa Rica two and a half years ago and bought the 110-hectare property swathed in rain forest and boasting sweeping views of the Pacific slope and ocean beyond. They built the lodge in a year and a half and moved in last December.

The grandeur of the main house, perched on its ocean-view hilltop, seems to belie the mom-and-pop nature of this operation. In addition to making guests feel welcome, John, 55, keeps busy maintaining the infinity pool and the 12-kilowatt hydroelectric system that powers the lodge, while Maureen, 53, ensures that a constant stream of delicious meals emanates from the kitchen. A small staff and canine companions Molly, Darcy and Palomo round out the hospitable crew.



Owners John and Maureen Paterson at the stable.

Meg Yamamoto | Tico Times

The main house is a grandiose affair. Floor-to-ceiling windows and doors take advantage of the view, while a large central fireplace, open on all sides, adds ambience. Wood furnishings, antique doors and a ceiling lined with *caña brava* reeds round out the decor. Inviting sitting areas abound here, and a large bar beckons guests to gather around it and chat with the congenial hosts.

Accommodations in the main house consist of three guest rooms, the star of which is El Cielo, featuring panoramic ocean and jungle views, a private wraparound terrace, queen-size canopy bed, cozy sitting area and a large bathroom with a shower that lets bathers enjoy the view.



El Cielo features a private terrace and a view down to the Pacific Ocean.

Meg Yamamoto | Tico Times

A short walk from the house is Mono Congo, a private cabin nestled at the edge of the jungle. A handsome deck welcomes guests to the cabin, which is constructed completely from local wood. Amenities include a queen-size canopy bed piled high with fluffy pillows, as well as a comfortable sitting area surrounded by large, handmade windows that open directly onto mossy trees, with a peekaboo view of the ocean beyond. The bathroom features a gas-heated shower open to the scents and sounds of the jungle.

Down a steep hillside from the main house, three A-frame cabins offer more rustic accommodations, with one double or two twin beds and appealing bathrooms completely lined with river stones.

For longer stays, the Amapola Cottage, a short distance past the main house, is fully equipped with a king-size bedroom, separate living, dining and kitchen area with wood-burning fireplace, a

Getting There, Rates, Contact Info

From San José, take the Inter-American Highway south to San Isidro de El General (about three hours) and turn right at the sign to Dominical. Pass through town and head west over the



Buy My Beans: Manuel Alfaro bags green beans at the Sunday farmers' market in Coronado. Alfaro grows his crops near Cartago, several kilometers to the southeast. See this Friday's [print or electronic edition](#) of The Tico Times for more on this story

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huge, high-ceilinged bathroom and a private garden Jacuzzi. A lovely stone patio is fronted by a large garden with a wide view down to the ocean.

With the nearest restaurant three bumpy kilometers away on the main road, meals come included in the room rates. Dinners might consist of tender trout in lemon-tarragon sauce or tasty grilled chicken skewers, while as-you-like-it breakfasts may include fresh fruit, granola and yogurt, eggs and bacon or some of Maureen's mouthwatering fresh-baked banana muffins.

The Patersons call Río Magnolia Lodge an ecotourism project, and their commitment to protecting the environment includes a recycling program they established for the local community, La Alfombra, as well as a solar drier for laundry and their sustainable hydroelectric system. Most of their vast property remains protected in its natural state and forms part of a biological corridor that provides habitat for wildlife movement.

Nature lovers will find no shortage of activities here, with trails running throughout the property, including an easy, one-kilometer walk through the rain forest that lets hikers take in ancient trees, the heady scent of jungle flora and the distinctive call of toucans. Anteaters, kinkajous, peccaries, coatis, sloths and white-faced and howler monkeys have been spotted on the property, along with a wide variety of birds. Guided horseback rides are available courtesy of four happy, well-fed horses in Río Magnolia's private stable.

For those wanting to venture off the property, the manifold attractions of the southern Pacific coast, about a 40-minute drive away, include surfing at Dominical, whale- and dolphin-watching at Ballena National Marine Park, kayaking at Playa Ventanas and simply relaxing on any number of area beaches, some virtually deserted. Horseback rides to nearby Nauyaca Falls and zipline canopy tours at Hacienda Barú National Wildlife Refuge are also available.

Offering an interesting venue for intimate weddings, the lodge hosted the nuptials of the Patersons' son, David, in April. Seventeen guests were accommodated for the event, in what the Patersons hope was a trial run for more to come.

A wedding party – indeed, any guest – couldn't hope for nicer hosts.

Disclosure: Tico Times Weekend Editor Meg Yama-moto is Canadian.

Check out a sampling of *The Tico Times'* ever-popular travel guide, *Exploring Costa Rica*, at http://www.ticotimes.net/guidebook/exploring_costarica.cfm?index=100.

mountains toward the Pacific Ocean. About 20 minutes from San Isidro, look for the Río Magnolia Lodge turnoff on the right, 500 meters past Los Chorros Mirador and Restaurant. After the turnoff, take the first right and continue for 3 km. The dirt road winds through the village of La Alfombra, crosses three rivers and eventually ends at the Río Magnolia gate. The lodge is 1 km past the property gate along a bumpy but scenic road through lush rain forest. Four-wheel drive is necessary for the last 1.5 km.

Double-occupancy room rates, including three meals per day for two people but not taxes, are \$239 for the A-frame cabins; \$249 for the standard guest rooms in the main lodge; \$269 for El Cielo in the main lodge; \$279 for Mono Congo cabin; and \$329 for Amapola Cottage (\$209 without meals). Weekly rates are also available.

For information and reservations, call 8307-1036 or 8868-5561, e-mail info@riomagnolia.com or visit www.riomagnolia.com.



Roy Arguedas Arias | Tico Times

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