



the art of relaxation

TRAVELER'S GUIDE TO COSTA RICA'S BEST SPAS

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Hotel Río Perlas, Cartago

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Elements that join body, mind and spirit – in that order – and that remain afterwards in our senses, giving our existence the placidity of greater things: this is what a good spa does for us!

And in a country like ours, the elements are as varied as their combinations, all according to your tastes and needs:

facial, therapeutic and full-body massage; mud, clay, fruit, oil and salt masks; aromatic steam, mineral and volcanic salt saunas; Turkish baths; reflexology; digitpuncture; application of hot stones and crystals; hydrotherapies in natural or artificial pools, in either pure or volcanic water; body wraps with volcanic mud, natural creams or oils; aromatherapy; yoga; soft music or the sounds of nature in the background.

In addition to applying techniques the eastern world has shown us for pacifying our daily trials and aid in treating physical ailments, Costa Rica offers a range of complementary natural elements: just open a window in the

spa of your choosing and you'll hear birdsong, a rushing river, or the sea. You'll experience the lush tropical color of our flora, the aromas of our forests and beaches, the overwhelming sight of a volcano.

We undertook the task of selecting a sample of the best spas within Costa Rica. We visited most of them, and we've got good news: from luxurious, elegant spas boasting the vanguard of technology to spas that take advantage of the surrounding environment in order to bring a communion-like experience with nature with minimal environmental impact. And all, without exception, have technically trained personnel.

Here is our special on Costa Rican spas.



Northern Zone: San Carlos

Our northern zone is full of natural and man-made marvels: Arenal Volcano supplies the area with clay and volcanic waters, which are rich in nutritive minerals and salts that nourish our skin and return elasticity and softness to it. The tropical rainforest is rich in animal and plant species and is easy to get to. A wonderful tropical climate and a good tourism-based infrastructure offer something for all tastes and budgets.

El Tucano Hotel Occidental Therma Spa

Description: A large Italian-Roman building is the cornerstone. Exquisitely decorated and staffed with highly qualified professionals, El Tucano has the makings of an unforgettable stay. This is one of the most luxurious spas. It offers work areas depending on if the user is male or female, as well as a thermo-mineral pool. **Therma Spa** spares no

detail in making everything perfect: background music, aromatherapy, flowers, neatness, excellent personnel, decoration, discretion and intimacy. **Services:** Range from a haircut to all types of therapeutic massages to even electrotherapy as an alternative. They are currently developing treatments with hot stones, watsu, shiatsu and Thai massages. **Location:** Agua Caliente, San Carlos, Alajuela, 8 km from Ciudad Quesada towards Aguas Zarcas. **Telephone:** (506) 233-8936. **Reservations:** (506) 460-3152. **Prices:** From \$8 to \$120.

Tabacón Hot Springs Resort & Spa

Description: Situated in the thermal hot springs that come from Arenal Volcano, **Iskandria Spa** is open to nature. Instead of windows there are gardens, and you can hear the birdsong and falling rain from inside the spa. They perform around

35 professional physiotherapies in eight rooms. There are five bungalows for couples' treatments. **Services:** Thirty-five physiotherapies offer all types of massages and facials as well as alternative therapies with technically proven natural products. Thermal mineral pools and jacuzzi also available. **Location:** La Fortuna de San Carlos, Alajuela, two and a half hours from San José. **Telephone:** Costa Rica (506) 519-1900. Reservations from the US and Canada: 1-877-277-8291. **www.tabacon.com.** E-mail: iskandria@tabacon.com. **Prices:** From \$13 to \$157.

Hotel Montaña de Fuego

Description: **Gadi Spa** is named after the place that King David went to rest. With six treatment and one aesthetic rooms, a turbulent pool and sauna. Will soon have a new room with a great view of Arenal Volcano for couples' treatments.

Services: Aesthetic, facial, body and couples' treatments, with natural products (fruits and sugar, salts, coconut oil, orange oil, orange cream), pure mud taken on-site, and well-known facial products. **Location:** 8 km west of La Fortuna, San Carlos, on the road to Arenal Volcano. **Telephone:** 460-1220 ext 118. www.montanadefuego.com. **Prices:** From \$15 to \$140.

Arenal Paraíso Resort & Spa

Description: Mayin Spa is an open-air place with a panoramic view of Arenal Volcano and beautiful gardens. It has two rooms for mud wraps and couples' massages, two saunas, gym and thermal-water jacuzzi. **Services:** Swedish massage, aromatherapy massage, reflexology, volcanic stones, mud wraps, hydrotherapy and body and facial treatments. Offers exclusive treatments and packages for men. **Location:** 7 km west of La Fortuna de San Carlos, on the road to Arenal Volcano. **Telephone:** 460-5333 ext. 310. www.mayinspa.com. **Prices:** From \$25 to \$140.

Baldi Hot Springs Hotel, Resort & Spa

Description: Delph Bio Spa is located within the Baldi tourism complex, which is a popular swimming area with 10 thermal pools. Each pool is a different temperature, according to the spring that feeds it. The spa's facilities are built with light-colored stones and large windows that overlook natural pools and exuberant gardens. **Services:** Swedish massage, hot stones and reflexology, natural exfoliations, clay wraps, facial cleansing and special packages. **Location:** 4 km west of La Fortuna de San Carlos, on the road to Arenal Volcano. **Telephone:** 363-0036/ 479-9125. www.delphbiospa.com. **Prices:** From \$20 to \$100.

Termales del Bosque Hotel - Natural Spa

Description: Borders Juan Castro Blanco National Park and is situated within primary forest where mineral hot springs and swirls of volcanic mud come from Arenal Volcano. You get to the spa after walking a 350-meter path that runs alongside a river. Birds and insects provide the soundtrack, the flora the visuals. **Natural Spa's** philosophy is to enjoy nature with a minimal environmental impact. **Services:** Seven thermal pools, an aromatic natural sauna fed by natural thermal steam vents, energizing or calming massages (depending on your mental state), lymphatic drainage, mud wraps and



aromatherapy. **Location:** Aguas Calientes de San Carlos, 10 km towards Aguas Zarcas from Ciudad Quesada. **Telephone:** 460- 4740/ 460- 1356. www.termaldelbosque.com. E-mail: termaldelbosque@racsaco.cr. **Prices:** From \$8 to \$20.

Alajuela, San Ramón

This region has a cloud forest comparable to that of Monteverde, but much closer: less than an hour from Juan Santamaría International Airport. Tourist attractions abound: canopy tours, waterfalls, Sarchí's handicrafts (the birthplace of Costa Rican folk art), Poás and Arenal volcanoes, birdwatching, hiking and horseback riding over nature trails.

Villa Blanca Cloud Forest Hotel & Spa

Description: Located in a cloud forest nature reserve, it's neo-colonial style has recently been

remodeled under the philosophy of sustainable tourism and minimal environmental impact. The architecture is reminiscent of Costa Rican villages of a century ago. The spa's name describes the place perfectly: "The Silence of the Angles." **Services:** The spa is located within one of the cozy cottages, where you can access a variety of massages, mud wraps, exfoliations with salt from the Dead Sea. Coffee, coco and citrus products are available. This spa is staffed by personnel and products from Serenity Spas, which administers several spas throughout the country. In 2006 the spa will move to new facilities within the mountain, taking advantage of the panoramic vista of the cloud forest, as well as offering many new services. **Location:** San Ramón, 9 km to the right of the Rural Police station, in El Silencio de los Angeles. **Telephone:** (506) 461- 0300/ (506) 461-03-01. www.villablanca-costarica.com. information@villablanca-costarica.com. reservations@villablanca.com. **Prices:** From \$38 to \$175.

Cartago

This is the old capital. Here, the presence of Irazú and Turrialba volcanoes, the architectural jewels at the Basilica de los Angeles, the Orosi church, and the Ujarrás ruins complement a bucolic agricultural region.

Hotel Río Perlas Resort & Spa

Description: Located within a large, new hotel, this is the perfect place to enjoy the mountain setting. The resort is close, intimate, beautiful and boasts excellent services. The spa is set among gardens, with a view of the surrounding mountains. A solarium and thermal hot spring pool are nearby. **Services:** therapeutic massages, bubble, Turkish and steam baths, aromatherapy, salts, exfoliations, facials, sun room, infrajet and dermajet treatments. **Location:** Central Valley, Orosi, Cartago, 39 km from downtown San San José. **Telephone:** (506) 533- 3341. www.hotelrioperlas.com. E-mail: sales@hotelrioperlas.com. **Prices:** From \$2.50 to \$95.

Limón

The province of Limón has a magic all of its own. Evergreen landscapes, peerless beaches, Creole food, its climate, people, scent, October Carnaval:

Recommendations

- Let your therapist know about any physical ailments you have in order to treat the area specifically or not touch the area, if it's something chronic.
- If you use the hot springs, do so in 10-minute intervals. Keep hydrated. If you have high blood pressure, let the spa personnel know.
- It's better to receive treatments on an empty stomach so digestive activity doesn't distract from your relaxation, especially if you'll receive treatments to the pelvis and stomach.
- Keep silent, be vigilant of your breathing and the sounds of nature that surround you.



Glossary

SWEDISH MASSAGE: a gentle relaxing anti-stress massage.

SHIATSU: Japanese massage that works meridian points of energy to make it flow.

THAI: Massage with stretching and pressure, used to activate circulation and relax muscles.

LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE MASSAGE: Moves lymph fluid, taking toxins to the lymphatic glands where they are eliminated.

DIGITPUNCTURE: The mother of acupuncture. It achieve an energy balance by touching points with the fingertips.

REFLEXOLOGY: Therapeutic massage that is done in the reflex points for all the body's organs. These points are located on the feet and hands.

MASSAGE WITH HOT STONES: A relaxing massage with heated river stones.

THERAPEUTIC MUD OR CLAY: Contain mineral elements and salts that balance the yin and yang energies.