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Tempo Weekend Guide

TROPIC ZONE

LIVE THE WILD LIFE IN COSTA RICA

By JENNIFER CEASER



November 15, 2007 -- For some time now, Costa Rica has been the go-to place for adventurous, eco-minded vacationers. So it's no surprise that the country has spurred the interest of the same kind of home buyer. With affordable real estate, reasonable closing costs (about 3.5 percent of a property's value) and very low property taxes (think \$1,000 on a \$400,000 property), this is one of those rare places where you can actually stretch an American dollar.

So if you don't mind the five- to seven-hour flight, developments are sprouting up all along the Pacific Coast - with a concentration in Tamarindo and Dominical.

Tamarindo Preserve

Surfers first put Tamarindo on the map, and while prices in the area have increased and accommodations have become more high-end, it's still a dusty town (literally - the main road is unpaved) full of funky restaurants and plenty of local flavor.

In an effort to maintain the town's charm and reduce the impact of new construction on the area, Tamarindo Preserve developers chose to build on less than 10 percent of its 500-acre parcel. (They are also donating 150 acres to a local nature conservancy.)

"Our buyers aren't looking for your typical resort community with a golf course," says Derek Main, one of the principals of Meta Development, Tamarindo Preserve's developer. "They want the real experience of living in Costa Rica. And by keeping much of the property undeveloped, we're able to give them that."

Tamarindo Preserve is a sort of microcosm of the diverse Guanacaste region, encompassing shoreline, dry forest, meadows, estuaries and rugged hills. Nestled among this varied topography will be a total of 288 residences ranging from 1,500 to 5,500 square feet and priced from \$500,000 to \$4.5 million. Homes in The Point area (near the ocean) are the most expensive. To date, 39 residences have sold.

All homes come fully furnished and are outfitted with Travertine limestone floors; teak millwork throughout (including teak ceilings in the great room and master bedroom); Sub-Zero, Wolf and Kitchen-Aid appliances; Toto toilets and central AC. Larger homes will have outdoor pools, full outdoor kitchens and garages. Services include housekeeping, local bill payment, airport shuttles and restaurant reservations. Owners can put their property into a rental pool to generate income.

There will also be several clubs on the property, with activities that correspond to their location. The Beach Club will have multiple pools, cabanas and a bistro; there you can arrange to fish, scuba-dive or take a surfing lesson. Perched high above the Preserve, the Canopy Club will boast a fine-dining restaurant, game room and fitness center. The Estuary Club will have kayaks available to explore the mangrove forest and observe wildlife, including rare bird species and howler monkeys.

The Village Center will have a mix of cafes, grocery stores and boutiques, and the Spa will offer yoga and various treatments. And an Interpretive Center will have a resident naturalist who will give guided tours.
tamarindopreserve.com

Punta Dominical

Dominical might be a bit difficult to get to (you must connect through San Jose to one of two small airports, then drive about 40 minutes), but its isolation has helped preserve much of its natural beauty. (Perhaps that's why Mel Gibson chose to buy in the area.)

Spread out among nearly 2,000 acres, Punta Dominical is made up of several developments that range from condos (Marisol), to villas (Kiana Resorts, Canto Del Mar), to custom home sites (Las Olas). An eco-friendly approach is being taken here as well: Only 20 percent of the land is being developed.

The second phase of Marisol, set high on a ridge with ocean views, will be released by January. Prices for the 24 fully furnished one- and two-bedroom units, ranging from 980 to 1,200-plus square feet, will start at \$250,000 and go to more than \$450,000. Move-in dates are expected in spring of 2009. The Marisol community, with 54 condos in total, will have three pools and a fitness center.

Additional lots in the Las Olas section will be released next month, with half-acre lots featuring stunning views of the ocean and mountains starting at \$500,000. Four floor plans are offered; homes are built in the Spanish Colonial style with high-end fixtures, marble floors and landscaped grounds.

While the Kiana and Canto del Mar villas have sold, some resales are available for around \$500,000. (800) 503-5374; puntadominical.com