

**DESTINATION:** Nuevo Arenal, Esterillos Oeste & Limon Province, Puerto Viejo

**DATE OF TRAVEL:** February, 2019

**WEATHER:** Hot and sunny with intermittent downpours, 25-30°C

**TRAVELLER:** Talia Wooldridge

**COUNTRY:** COSTA RICA

## Getting High

High up in the misty hills of Nuevo Arenal sits **Hotel Mystica**, a magical healing sanctuary overlooking Lake Arenal and its volcano. Locals and tourists veer up the winding roads to enjoy a savoury menu in a quiet fireside ambience. Run by Italian owners, Francesco Carullo and Barbara Moglia, Mystica serves healthy breakfasts with locally grown fruits and herbs, free-range eggs, fluffy pancakes and fresh juices. For dinner, full-bodied wines accompany heavenly homemade ravioli, thin-crust pizzas and banana leaf-wrapped fish baked in a traditional wood-burning oven. The tasty Banana Cream Pie and Chocolate Torte desserts are musts. [www.mysticacostarica.com/wordpress/restaurant/](http://www.mysticacostarica.com/wordpress/restaurant/)

## IN THE SHADE

Under two sprawling beach almond trees, the lively and intimate atmosphere of **Los Almendros Restaurant** is infectious; a contrast to the otherwise sleepy Esterillos Oeste, a Pacific beach town south of Jaco. Canadian expat Karen Young designed the Caribbean-Asian menu featuring Pad Thai, Indonesian Gado Gado, Caribbean-style stewed chicken with rice and beans and the best tuna poke I've ever had. Her Costa Rican husband, Andres Carvajal, is the chef. We came to enjoy their popular sushi night and array of sauces and dishes all made from scratch, including the fresh coconut milk. Caribbean-inspired cocktails, such as the hibiscus flower margarita and pear ginger martini, along with local craft beers on tap paired our selections perfectly. Gluten-free and vegan options are readily available. [www.facebook.com/LosAlmendrosRestaurant/](https://www.facebook.com/LosAlmendrosRestaurant/) [app/157563764278358/](https://www.facebook.com/LosAlmendrosRestaurant/)



## COSTA RICA

COSTA RICA'S LUSH coastlines, rain forests and dedication to environmental sustainability provide the best eco-conscious travelling in the world. Beside sloths and howler monkeys, scrumptious world cuisine by Canadian, Italian, Caribbean and Argentine expats awaits.

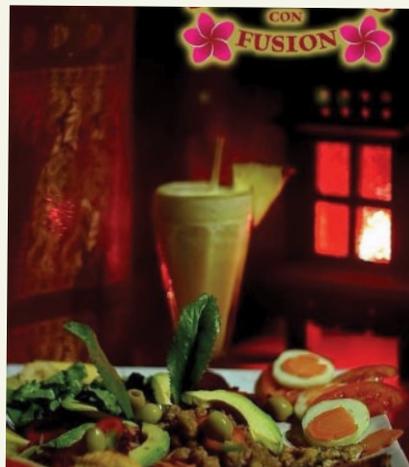
## GOING COASTAL

**STASHU's con FUSION** is a dinner-only restaurant located in Puerto Viejo de Talamanca on Costa Rica's Caribbean coast. The menu reflects the diverse background of owner Stashu Gola, a Guyanese-Trinidadian chef who relocated to Costa Rica in 2002 from Toronto, where

he worked at Caribbean restaurant, Bamboo. At Stashu's, world curries are offered alongside New Orleans baked garlic, Tandoori sauces, fresh focaccia, spicy pakoras and steamed mussels. The restaurant is an oasis for travellers who enjoy unique but balanced flavours. Its new location is in the Lotus Garden Hotel. [www.facebook.com/Stashu-Con-Fusion-175927065802353/](https://www.facebook.com/Stashu-Con-Fusion-175927065802353/)

## ON THE GRILL

**El Rincon Porteño's** circular, open-air *parilla*, across from the Jaguar Rescue Center, is easily one of Puerto's best kept secrets. Daily lunch specials include juicy grilled chicken, steak and pork, or wood-oven pizzas. I timed my late-night dinner in between tropical downpours. A hearty Malbec wine was recommended by the friendly, knowledgeable Argentine staff. Soft Brazilian music echoed behind the roar of the rain. I returned to enjoy a vegan pizza for lunch the following day, the cerulean Caribbean ocean peeking out through the lush jungle. 256, Limón, Limón Province, Punta Cocles 



Stashu's