

The Central Pacific Coast

by Hernán Carazo



This coastal area of Costa Rica extends from Puntarenas in the north to Quepos-Manuel Antonio area in the south and includes expansive, semi-deserted beaches such as Playa Hermosa and Esterillos known to surfers around the globe, as well as Jaco Beach, Costa Rica's most popular beach resort with both locals and tourists for over 20 years and Herradura beach which is home to the World Class Marriott-Los Sueños Resort and residential development with its outstanding marina and golf course. At the northern end is the town of Puntarenas with its new Sea Aquarium and a popular stop for many cruise ships and at the southern end is the sport fishing town of Quepos and its adjoining neighbor, the extremely popu-

lar Manuel Antonio National Park. This area of the country is currently experiencing a building and tourism boom, especially in and around Jaco beach due to its proximity to the capital city of San Jose, which is less than 2 hours away via some very scenic roads. This area will really take off in the near future (2-3 years) when the long awaited "San Jose-Ciudad Colon-Orotina-Caldera Highway" is completed which will cut the driving time in half. The five major bridges on this highway are now completed and the \$140+ million highway construction project is scheduled to begin construction this year. The Carara Biological Reserve and Manuel Antonio National Park make this a must visit area for tourists year round but there is



something for everyone here. If your idea of paradise is walking down a deserted, misty beach accompanied only by the sounds of nature then welcome to the beaches of Hermosa, Esterillos, Bejuco and Palo Seco. On the other hand if all the luxury and excitement of a World Class Resort is your cup of tea, then the Marriott-Los Sueños Resort and Marina with its 5 star accommodations, luxury condominiums and residences and an outstanding golf course shared only with an occasional monkey or two awaits your enjoyment. Looking for something in between, no problem, this area offers a wide variety of lodging, entertainment, shops, restaurants and tours ! In between Jaco and Quepos (about 47 miles) you will pass



the town of Parrita, which along with the surrounding beaches is still relatively undiscovered by foreign tourists and offers miles and miles of undisturbed beaches and wetlands. As you drive past you will see miles and miles of African Palm plantations neatly arranged row after row and only separated by the occasional company town built around a town square and with the ever-present company store seemingly frozen in time. Several new bridges have been completed on this road and after crossing the very last one you will have arrived in the laid back town of Quepos which still reflects a part of its past. In the 1930's banana plantations were established, turning Quepos into a busy shipping port. In the 1950's, a banana

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blight swept through the plantations and the Standard Fruit company switched to the African palms we still see today.

Few places can offer you so much to enjoy as the Quepos – Manuel Antonio area. The town of Quepos is a sport-fishing center and also offers restaurant and entertainment options servicing the many hotels on the mountain road between it and Manuel Antonio National Park located 4 miles away. Manuel Antonio National Park offers visitors everything from white-sand beaches, brightly colored birds, friendly monkeys, a coral reef, and a rainforest packed with a variety of wildlife ready to amaze you. This 1,680+ acre park, the pride of Costa Rica's National Park system, is located on a peninsula backed by forested hills and includes the waters of the Pacific on three sides and has in fact become so popular that a daily quota of visitors was introduced to protect the park from the adverse effects of too many visitors. The park also includes an immense (136,000 acres) protected area of the sea perfect for the scuba diver who wants to see marine life up close. This area also offers great tours on all terrain vehicles and on horseback to see the interior areas and spectacular views as well as waterfalls plus sport fishing, bird watching, photographing wildlife, river rafting, mountain biking, hiking, dolphin and whale watching trips, hikes through the park, enjoying the nightlife or simply relaxing at your hotel and watching unforgettable sunsets while sipping a tall, cool drink and asking yourself what took you so long to finally discover this corner of paradise.

