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IN COSTA RICA'S LUSH PENINSULA PAPAGAYO,
ADVENTURE, PAMPERING & EXCLUSIVITY AWAIT

by Holly Crawford

As our car rounds a bend to reveal an impressive arched gateway, the driver announces we have reached the entrance to our destination: a lush development known as Peninsula Papagayo. Sentinel at the entryway is a white marble sculpture by Costa Rican artist Jorge Jimenez Deredia; a languid, feminine form representing life. From here the long, winding road is lined with majestic palms, the sea crashing on the cliffs to one side. On the other, the spectacular Arnold Palmer Signature Golf Course; and if you have sharp eyes, a monkey or two perched in the treetops. »

■ COSTA RICA



The main living space at a villa at Exclusive Resorts Peninsula Papagayo.

» The region known as the Gulf of Papagayo is located on the Northwest Pacific Coast of Costa Rica, a short drive from Liberia and Daniel Oduber International Airport. Much of the area has been designated a National Park known as Santa Rosa, renowned for its excellent weather, bays of tranquil water and stunning scenery.

In the 1970s the government of Costa Rica earmarked the remaining area strictly for resort and tourism development, and today the cornerstone is the 2,300-acre project known as Peninsula Papagayo. With 15 miles of coastline and 31 beaches, the anchor resort is the Four Seasons Resort and Residences, which has become the brand's flagship resort hotel. Just up the hillside, and with some privileges from the Four Seasons, is our final stop: Exclusive Resorts Peninsula Papagayo.

The road continues its windy path, climbing gently higher until we reach Exclusive Resorts and its 17 residences. The villas are tucked into the lush jungle on 30 acres of land on the south side of the peninsula. Each is perched cliff side offering a dramatic view across the ocean and beyond.

A warm welcome from our personal con-

cierge, and we're inside our villa for a tour of the amenities. The accommodations are expansive, each with four large bedrooms and four-and-a-half baths. The thinking here is that this is your home away from home, equipped with everything you could wish for (or the concierge will find it for you), ample space, and a relaxing, private atmosphere to escape, unwind and reconnect with loved ones.

Even before we arrived, the concierge was asking questions to make sure our stay would be as seamless as possible. What types of activities we might want to book before arrival, what our daily routine was like, what time we liked breakfast, and what to stock the refrigerator with before we arrived. Anything that could be done in advance to assure we could settle into "vacation mode" from the moment we set foot inside the villa.

The villa's open concept begins with a sweeping entryway leading into a large, luxurious lounge space. Completely open, this connects with a dining space (large enough for 10) and gourmet kitchen – all open to the views outside with continuous glass doors waiting to be flung open. The indoor space leads outside to a large »



The dining room with pool view at a villa at Exclusive Resorts Peninsula Papagayo.

■ COSTA RICA



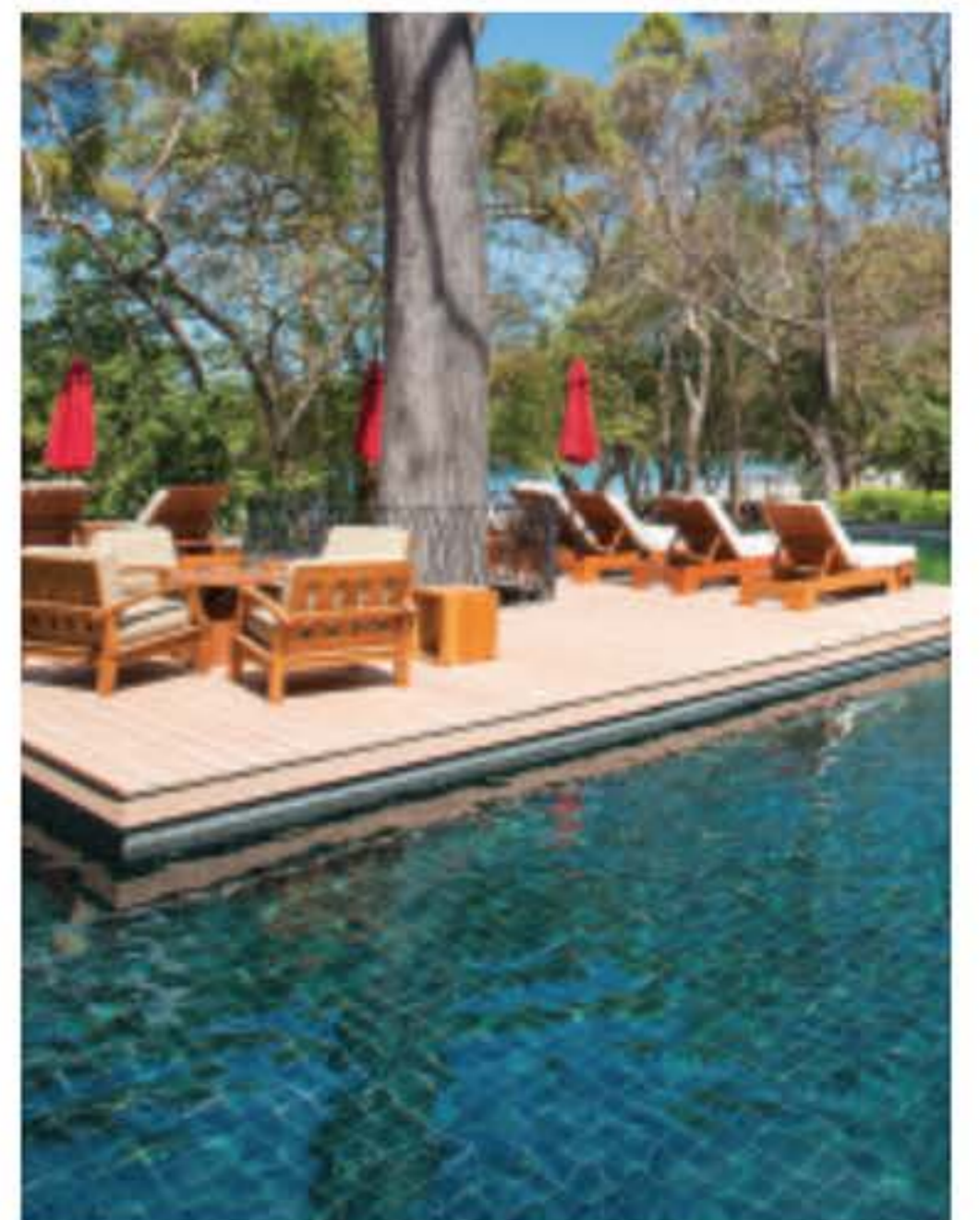
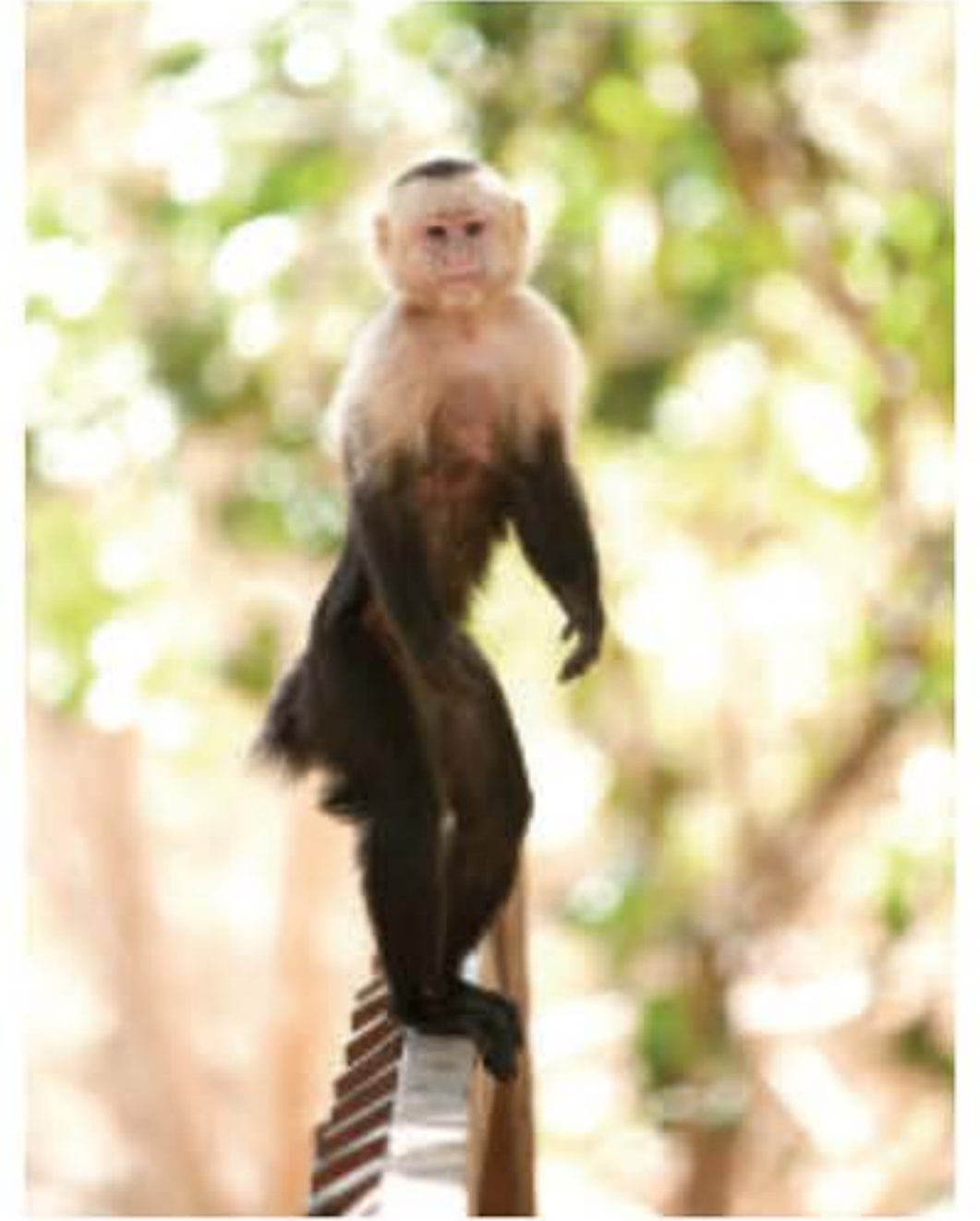
Each of the bedrooms at Exclusive Resorts Peninsula Papagayo has a private patio and outdoor shower.

» outdoor eating area as well as lounging area around a private infinity pool and hot tub. They have not forgotten an outdoor grill and cooking station any home cook would lust after.

From outside, the patio space continues the length of the villa, all with a stunning view, and all looking like it was purpose built for a convivial evening with friends and family.

The villa boasts two master suites – one upstairs and one downstairs – plus two more equally large and well-dressed bedrooms. Each of the bedrooms features a large bathroom and its own private outdoor shower. The bathrooms are stocked with Molton Brown bath products, and the home is equipped with a full washer and dryer. You'll find a television with AppleTV in the living room as well as each of the bedrooms, along with great WIFI service. The entire villa – including the outdoor space – is completely setup with speakers and surround sound; just plug in your device and it's ready to go.

It doesn't take long to find us camped poolside, enjoying the last sunlight of the day. The kitchen was stocked with our favourites before we arrived, so there is little to do but sit back and enjoy. »



Clockwise from top right: Costa Rica's wildlife is on full display, monkeys often visit guests poolside; the bar at Poro Poro is the spot for a signature crafted cocktail or a mixology lesson; the pool at Poro Poro; dining at Poro Poro.

■ COSTA RICA

» Morning arrives with a perfect sunrise, and soon after a perfect breakfast. We have arranged for breakfast to be prepared and served at our villa – even better than room service – with the meal made fresh in our kitchen, and the table set and adorned with fresh fruit and flowers. Each morning the menu is a little different, and each day as we finish a last cup of coffee, the kitchen is sparkling clean again.

Eventually the time comes to venture outside of our grand oasis and exploration of Poro Poro, the property's main clubhouse, is on the agenda. Each villa is equipped with its own golf cart to get around the property; and we quickly realize the short climb back up the hill to our villa would be a serious cardio workout without it. The clubhouse and Poro Poro restaurant are located at the lowest point of the property, and there you'll find the short path that continues to the private beach. Each of the villas is nestled higher and higher along the cliff side, situated to take advantage of the stunning views. At Poro Poro you'll find a large infinity pool, outdoor bar and restaurant.

The atmosphere here is beachside elegant, surrounded by lush tropical foliage. The tables are tucked along the pool, a casual spot for daytime meals and monkey spotting; while in the evening it becomes a twinkling space to share dinner and a glass of wine.

If you are in the mood to explore, a shuttle is available to take guests to Playa Prieta Beach Club, the 38,000 square-foot hide away with a fitness centre, pool, restaurants and activities for children. There is also a tennis complex and golf club, or you can schedule a visit to the spa at the neighbouring Four Seasons Resort.

We opt for the spa to come to us, and book in-room treatments by Aquam Spa. Like most things at Exclusive Resorts, you can have it come to you, and in a blink my bedroom's private patio has become a spa treatment room, complete with music and aromatherapy oils.

Settling into a lounge to enjoy the bliss from my massage and enjoy the view, I realize I could quite possibly never leave this villa again, and be very seriously content. ■

If you go:

Choose a flight to Liberia rather than San Jose, as the drive is much shorter from Liberia.

Arrange for pantry staples, beverages, etc to be stocked prior to your arrival, and be sure to pack your essentials, or get them prior to leaving Liberia. Shopping is limited in this slightly remote area.

Exclusive Resorts
exclusiveresorts.com