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## HIDE AWAY AT VILLA MANZU

*Story by Anne Z. Cooke; photos by Steve Haggerty/ColorWorld*

For most visitors to tropical Costa Rica, home of Central America's finest coffee and coffee plantations, it's the memory of that first, early-morning cup of joe that's likely to linger longest.

But for a very few, very lucky travelers, their most treasured experience will be the week they spend with friends – or family – at Villa Manzu, a private mansion on the exclusive Papagayo Peninsula, on Costa Rica's northwest coast.

More than a luxury resort, more than boutique hotel, more than an adventure lodge, this remarkable private home, among the trees on an ocean cliff, promises a dream vacation: luxury, comfort, outdoor discovery, fine cuisine, impeccable service and no-stress days.

If peace and quiet is in your stars, float in the pool, watch the monkeys chattering in the trees or lounge under an umbrella on one of three quiet patios. If you're a type-A traveler, dig into outdoor activities ranging from surfing, kayaking and deep-sea fishing to yacht outings, golf, wildlife parks and helicopter-sightseeing.

When friends celebrated their anniversary at Villa Manza and invited us to the party, we weren't sure what to expect. What we saw, rounding that last corner, was a three-story contemporary stone mansion divided into connected wings. Surrounded by five acres of green lawns, native trees, flowering bushes, terraced pools and shaded patios, it was a universe unto itself.

"Make yourself at home," said our hostess, Stephanie, greeting us with giant hugs. "Take in the scenery. Join us in the pool; it's heated," she said, motioning toward the infinity pool on the patio. "But first, meet our butler, Luis Morera, who makes the most marvelous cocktails."

Melting away to greet other friends, she left us to admire the owner's collection of art and artifacts lining the corridors and living room walls. Two chefs looked up to smile "hello" from a professionally-equipped, open-air kitchen adjoining the living and dining rooms. A quick tour of the lower level revealed a theater, another bar and a casual party room opening onto a waterfall and second swimming pool.

From there, a path led down the hill to the beach. Instead, we followed a second path through the garden to the cliff, where a barbecue circle and seats faced the west, a set-up designed for sunset viewing. Upstairs we checked into one of eight enormous bedrooms, each decorated with a different theme and style of sleeping arrangements, and equipped with huge closets, mini-bars and spacious indoor-outdoor bathrooms.

Maintained by a trained staff of 12, including the managers – a husband-and-wife partnership – and the butler, three chefs, ground crew, maids and drivers, the house provides not just seamless luxury ut complete privacy. Priced accordingly, it's a favorite hideaway for celebrities, tech-company millionaires, movie moguls, industry titans and sports greats. For us, this little bit of heaven was a case of good friends and dumb luck.

"Sit at the counter and talk ingredients with the chefs," said Stephanie, reappearing. "They're happy to share their recipes. Or ask about tonight's recommended wine-pairings." Tomorrow, she insisted, we must walk down to the beach and try snorkeling. "Or you can take a car to the beach club, or to play golf. It's ten minutes away. Villa Manzu has guest privileges."

We came by plane, landing in Costa Rica's Liberia airport, 35 minutes away, where Villa Manzu's driver picked us up. Next time, he explained, come by yacht and dock in the local harbor. Maybe next time, we promised.



*A slow afternoon in the pool, at Villa Manzu, Costa Rica.*



*The design and décor in Villa Manzu's interiors reflect the arts of local and Southeast Asian indigenous cultures, Villa Manzu, Costa Rica.*



Your best bet? Plan a trip with family or friends and share the cost. The Villa sleeps 22 adults and/or children, and sometimes a more, depending on ages. While you're there, the house is yours, thus everything's included: Meals, wine, cocktails, snacks, sports equipment, fishing gear, a car, guides, and as always, old-fashioned Costa Rican hospitality.

*Bold forms, both inside and out, echo the rugged cliffs of the location, on the Papagayo Peninsula, Villa Manzu, Costa Rica.*

At Villa Manzu, the all-inclusive rate for the entire house and staff is priced per night. Call for dates, availability and current rates. Or go to [www.villamanzu.com](http://www.villamanzu.com) (<http://www.villamanzu.com>). More questions? Send them to Anne Z. Cooke at [travelswithanne@cs.com](mailto:travelswithanne@cs.com) (<mailto:travelswithanne@cs.com>).

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