

# BRIDES



## **Destination Wedding Inspiration: Costa Rica's Guanacaste Province**

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Brides-to-be dreaming of a destination wedding that is equal parts eco-friendly, exotic, and relatively close to home, look no further than Costa Rica. Readily accessible by direct flights from major cities across the U.S., this Central American country is known for its beautiful beaches, jungles, mountains, and incredible biodiversity.

"Nature is up close and personal here in Costa Rica," says Larissa Banting, President of Weddings Costa Rica, citing dolphins, monkeys, sloths, and parrots as some of the usual suspects visitors encounter. "Also, it's so varied — drive one hour and the landscape changes."

Located just nine degrees north of the equator, Costa Rica's weather cycles are similar to that of the Caribbean, with a dry season (December through April/May) and a green season (May through November). Being a tropical climate, it's not uncommon to have a passing rain shower or two even on sunny days, although September and October generally see the heaviest rains.

Planning a destination wedding is all about location, says Banting. It's a combination of finding the right fit for the couple's vision and also for the guests: "A good host and hostess are always trying to make their guests feel comfortable," says Banting.

Accessibility, climate, and choice wedding sites are three reasons why Costa Rica's northwestern province, Guanacaste, is one of country's most popular destinations for weddings and vacations in general. International flights land directly in its capital, Liberia, which is just a short drive from the resort enclave that surrounds the Gulf of Papagayo. Beachy surf towns, and resorts with a decidedly laid-back lifestyle, characterize the region's Pacific coastline, which extends south into the Nicoya Peninsula.

For ultra high-end, the Four Seasons Resort Costa Rica at Peninsula Papagayo and neighboring Andaz Peninsula Papagayo are two of the country's most luxe offerings. On the opposite side of Culebra Bay, eco-chic El Mangroove offers brides fully customizable wedding packages on a beachfront property that has been awarded the highest possible rank by the country's rigorous Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) program.

For a more bespoke affair, Guanacaste's coastal region is home to a number of "villa-style" hotels that can be rented out in entirety, such as the 8-bedroom Villa Buena Onda, which comes with a dedicated support team that includes a wedding planner and event staff to attend to every last detail of the big day, and the Villa de la Luna, an all-inclusive retreat that can host up to 28 guests. Wedding packages include all meals, open bar, private transportation, butler and maid service as well as concierge services for activity planning.

For resorts with a more remote, beachy vibe, look towards Tamarindo, a popular surf town, where you'll discover low-key gems such as Cala Luna Luxury Hotel & Villas and Florblanca Resort, two boutique hotels that are well equipped to host intimate affairs on the beach and on their grounds.

While options in Costa Rica's Guanacaste province abound, one thing's for certain — when the big day arrives you'll be imbued with pura vida — that quintessential, joyful Costa Rican attitude towards life.

"Costa Rica is all about pura vida," says Banting, an expat herself that fell in love with the country almost two decades ago. "When you come here, everything slows down and you live in the moment, really taking the time to enjoy everything around you."

For a celebration as monumental as this one, that sounds just right.

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