

## Review: Costa Rica's Playa Cativo Is a Remote Jungle Paradise

The resort sits on 1,000 private acres and is only accessible by boat



The beach at Playa Cativo experiences some drastic high and low tides, meaning you can get out and ELI LONDON explore the ocean floor

BY ELI LONDON / NOVEMBER 18, 2019 10:11 AM

Sometimes you get to a place and wish that A) Ian Fleming was still alive and B) you had him on speed-dial so you could tell him you've just stumbled on the setting of his next novel.

You'll find such a place at Playa Cativo, a stunning eco-lodge located on the Golfo Dulce, which separates mainland Costa Rica from the Osa Peninsula on the country's Pacific coast.

InsideHook recently had a chance to visit as part of a small media junket hosted by the resort, and we did not leave disappointed Here's what to expect from your stay.

## Getting to Playa Cativo

To arrive at the resort, you'll need to take a boat from the small towns of Golfito or Puerto Jimenez — or a yacht from wherever the hell you want (they can also accommodate helicopters). Unlike most resorts accessible only by boat, Playa Cativo is not on an island. Rather, it's surrounded by lush and impassable Piedras Blancas National Park, meaning there's no access by car or road.



The boat ride from Golfito is filled with colorful boats and lots and lots of green (Eli London)

The 18-room lodge has been in operation since 2013 and sits on its own 1,000-acre private nature reserve (which in turn abuts Piedras Blancas). Like most things in Costa Rica, Playa Cativo has a stated focus on sustainability and carbon neutrality. It depends on clean electric energy from a hydroelectric generator and solar panels, and an on-property farm currently grows about 60% of the food served.

## Eating and Drinking

In addition to the farm-to-table produce, the seafood is phenomenal. "We get our fish from local, responsible sources," operations manager Felipe Cruz tells InsideHook. "We also fish ourselves, and invite our guests to try artisanal hand-line fishing from our dock or with one of our boats. Our chefs can prepare your catch in many different ways."



Brunch With a view (Playa Cativo/Facebook)

Because the only way in and out is via boat, you can't exactly wander off premise to find the nearest Applebee's, so all three daily meals are included in the cost of the stay. You've got two options: the Gazebo Sunset Bar or a restaurant called El Gavilán, both of which have a set menu as well as daily specials based on what's most fresh.

The staff is also happy to work with guests on just about any meal requests they can think up (like, say, whatever you caught while deep-sea fishing, an activity offered by the resort). Liquor is extra, but they do have daily two-for-one happy hours, and the mini fridges in the rooms each house two bottles of local beer that are free of charge and restocked daily.



The main lodge sits nestled amongst trees. Private bungalows fan out to both sides. (Eli London)

## Sleeping (If You Must)

The lodge boasts a variety of sleeping arrangements, from private bungalows with outdoor showers and plunge pools to single rooms above the main lodge with incredible views of the front lawn and beach. There is no air conditioning on the property, but the open-air layout of the rooms keeps them breezy and plenty cool at night.

## Activities

Playa Cativo boasts over a mile of beautiful beaches lined with towering palm trees where you could easily spend the entire week. Other free activities include stand-up paddleboarding and ocean kayaking to explore the nearby gulf, and for a fee, they also offer guided nature hikes, snorkeling, deep-sea fishing and whale and dolphin watching. Golfo Dulce is an extremely popular wintering ground for whales from both the Northern and Southern hemispheres, so there are really only a few months of the year (April through July) devoid of whales. Dolphins live in the gulf year-round; expect them to swim right up to your boat if you take one out.



The walk to the farm is a nature hike in and of itself (Eli London)

You can also find a full-time wellness instructor who offers frequent open-to-all yoga sessions on a wooden platform surrounded by the canopy (a few members

of my group met some howler monkeys while they vinyasa'd). If you're in need of less group yoga and more muscle therapy, she is also available for individual sessions and/or massages.

## Drawbacks?

All of this obviously does not come cheap: rooms at Playa Cativo run around \$1,000 a night, though that includes all of your food. Other things some guest may have trouble with: The internet is mediocre at best inside the lodge and virtually non-existent at the outerlying bungalows. Additionally, remember that this is a tropical paradise, so wildlife is abundant throughout the property, from howler monkeys in the distance to some rather large and gnarly bugs gathering on walls and near lights. Mosquitos were luckily not too much of an issue, though. Finally, the rainy season, or "green" season as the locals call it, runs from May to November. Now that doesn't mean it's going to be raining constantly — rather, it means you should expect at least one brief, heavy downpour per day, usually in the afternoon, so get up early and explore and then have a few drinks at happy hour while it's raining.

## The Final Word

Overall, Playa Cativo was a rather unique experience. Thanks to the small size of the lodge, you have plenty of privacy and are able to appreciate nature in solitude, but there are enough guests around that you can mingle and make some new friends. The small size also translates to a great staff-to-guest ratio, meaning anytime you need anything, someone will be around to help. They also learn your name and make sure to use it, adding a nice personal touch. If you're looking for a nature-filled, eco-friendly trip (animals, ocean, jungle) but don't want to rough it, Playa Cativo is tough to beat.

[BOOK IT HERE](#)