

Escape

CLOCKWISE: JACARO ISLAND ECOLOGE, MUKUL, AND LA LANCHA REPRESENT CENTRAL AMERICA'S BEST NEW RESORTS.

JACARO ISLAND ECOLOGE

LA LANCHA

MUKUL BEACH, GOLF & SPA

CENTRAL AMERICA'S

Rising Stars

Nicaragua and Guatemala are now luxury destinations thanks to these five-star residents

BY PAUL RUBIO

Escape



MUKUL BEACH, GOLF & SPA

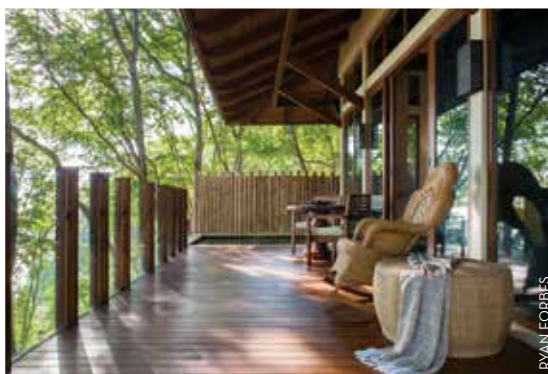


MUKUL'S BOHIOS, MADE FROM NATIVE TEAK AND PINE, HOUSE PRIVATE AMENITIES LIKE LARGE DECKS AND PLUNGE POOLS.

Emerald Coast, Nicaragua

When it opened in 2013, Mukul, which translates to “secret” in Mayan, heralded the first phase of the quarter billion-dollar, 1,670-acre Guacalito de la Isla private resort community along Nicaragua’s Emerald Coast. Now, on the heels of Guacalito’s latest expansion in 2016, the secret’s officially out: Mukul is one of the finest resorts in Latin America and a self-contained world of luxury excess.

Each of Mukul’s 37 thatched-roof villas is distinctly Nicaraguan, showcasing national identity through architecture and design. Exquisite, intricately patterned tiles from Granada’s oldest manufacturer line the floors and walls. Nature scenes come to life on bedside lamps constructed from Masaya volcano mud and then etched by local artists. Grass weavings and deconstructed bar-



RYAN FORBES

rels from Nicaragua’s iconic Flor de Caña rum factory have been reinvented as modern art. Hand-crafted furnishings at once represent the country’s prized wood industry and employ Mukul’s sustainability mantra through the use of fallen trees salvaged during hurricane cleanups. Private plunge pools, expansive decks, and complimentary minibars stocked with national beers such as Toña and Victoria Frost and homemade

treats like *cajeta de coco* (coconut candy) round out the experience.

Accommodations take shape as either 621-square-foot *bohios* or larger beach villas (measuring 2,000 to 3,000 square feet) outfitted with outdoor showers set inside gardens hewed in lava rock, an infinity-edge swimming pool, and separate dining and relaxation pavilions. A partitioned foyer provides personal butlers inconspicuous access to deliver morning coffee and cakes as well as evening nightcaps.

Beyond the posh digs, Mukul has everything one could covet in a top-tier, coastal resort. The Spa Mukul impresses with six thematic sanctuaries, each with a private entrance, bespoke hydrotherapy circuits, and signature treatments. Golfers gravitate toward the championship, David McLay Kidd-designed, 18-hole course cast over a pristine coastal forest. Outdoorsmen revel in snorkeling trips, turtle hatchling releases, and scenic hikes. Beach lovers chill at the Tres Ceibas Beach Club, take surf lessons, or enjoy other watersports like stand-up paddleboarding. Luxury jet-setters adore amenities like the 31-foot, 600-horsepower *Spirit of Mukul* yacht and weekly events such as the Nica Luau, an all-out beach party and feast every Thursday night. (mukulresort.com)



FOR MORE LUXE ACCOMMODATIONS, OPT FOR A SUITE, LIKE THE CASONA DON CARLOS (ABOVE) OR THE DOÑA VIVIAN (RIGHT).



ROBERTO VALLE



BASK IN NATIVE SURROUNDS IN LA LANCHA'S NEWLY RENOVATED LAKE-VIEW ROOMS (LEFT) AND ON THE FURNISHED DECK (BELOW).



Lake Petén Itzá, Guatemala

These days, director Francis Ford Coppola is equally famous for his films as he is for his esteemed luxury lodges in Belize. But one of his lesser-known projects finally is in the spotlight thanks to a major renovation in December 2015. Welcome to La Lancha, Coppola's charming boutique property in the heart of Guatemala's El Petén region, in close proximity to Tikal, the king of all Mayan ruins.

While archaeological endeavors anchor any trip to La Lancha, the refreshed lodge is an excuse to linger even longer along the wildlife-rich shores of Lake Petén Itzá. Thanks to the renovation and expansion, lake-view rooms have doubled in size and new rainforest junior suites have been erected high in the hilltops. All units are adorned in bold tapestries, textiles, and masks that represent the vibrant colors and diversity of Guatemala's indigenous people.

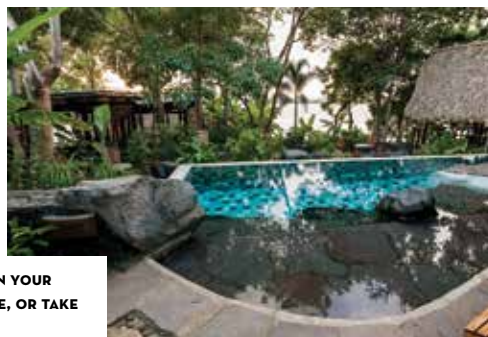
La Lancha's surrounds are untamed and incredibly picturesque. Exotic birdlife and butterflies light the sky like fireworks. Charismatic, curious, and chatty howler monkeys roam the forest canopy, often joining in some hammock downtime. Along the lake's edge, a slick new furnished deck provides a fantastic floating space to enjoy Petén Itzá's mesmerizing panoramas over cocktails. Adventure

seekers can also choose to canoe Guatemala's second largest lake with the hope of stumbling across some undiscovered Mayan artifacts. But La Lancha's guarantee of Mayan majesty lies in scheduled explorations to the nearby ancient city of Tikal, a destination so grand and mysterious it exudes a palpable Indiana Jones air of excitement. (thefamilycoppolaresorts.com)



EXPLORE THE ANCIENT MAYAN CITADEL TIKAL (LEFT) BY DAY AND RELAX IN THE LAKESIDE POOL BY NIGHT (ABOVE).

Escape



PRACTICE YOGA, UNWIND IN YOUR DOUBLE-STORY TREE HOUSE, OR TAKE A DIP IN THE ROCK POOL.

JICARO ISLAND ECOLODGE

Granada and Her Islands, Nicaragua

Nicaragua's most charming colonial town, Granada, is a maze of colorful, low-rise, sixteenth-century buildings, all of which recall the San Miguel de Allende of 25 years ago.

But just off the mainland, this history-steeped architecture gives way to hundreds of petite islands dotting the mammoth Lake Nicaragua.

One of these islands houses the upscale Jicaro Island Ecolodge. With just nine bungalows, this award-winning private escape is an intimate haven for ecotourism and personal wellness. Jicaro's double-story tree houses maintain a rustic feel, having been completely constructed from local, organic materials. On the island, you can rest and relax around the rock pool or gaze at the powerful Mombacho volcano from your terrace. Or, take full advantage of

the locale and kayak around Lake Nicaragua's *isletas*, hike up the aforementioned volcano, practice your bird identification skills from the canopy tower (there are over 300 species here), visit Jicaro's myriad sustainability projects within local communities, or engage in cooking and yoga classes on property.

Jicaro also offers daily boats to and from Granada proper, permitting travelers to stay at Jicaro and play in Granada. Long lunches at the restaurant El Zaguan precede ambles through the candy-colored streets of Granada. Located in the town's center, El Zaguan is famous for its celery salsa, grilled *guapote* (a tender white fish from Lake Nicaragua), and homemade sausages. But don't get too full here; experiential eats match the Jicaro experiences. Over on the island, you'll feast on coconut French toast with pineapple syrup and bananas Foster pancakes by morning and innovative, local-inspired dishes like plantain lasagna come evening. (jicarolodge.com) ◀◀

current

PROMOTION AND EVENTS • JANUARY 2017

LOGGERHEAD MARINELIFE CENTER

Loggerhead Marinelifelife Center's annual Lights Out Gala will celebrate the start of Florida's sea turtle nesting season. This year's gala, dubbed the "Swashbuckler Soirée," is set for January 27 at LMC from 6:30 to 11 p.m. and will feature an exciting production performance, a cocktail hour in the sea turtle hospital, a gourmet plated dinner, and more. Dance the night away at one of Palm Beach's most charming events, which raises critical funds for the center's ocean and sea turtle conservation. Tickets start at \$400. To purchase tickets or for more information, visit marinelife.org/lightson or call 561-627-8280, ext. 103.

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