

Resort Review

The Westin Golf Resort and Spa Playa Conchal, Guanacaste, Costa Rica

by Rex Ungericht, 12/17/17

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On November 2 - 6, 2017, my wife and I visited the Westin Playa Conchal on a company trip from Dallas, Texas, USA. This was our second time to Costa Rica and our first to the Westin.

About Costa Rica and Guanacaste



Image from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/User:Shamhain>

Situated in Central America with Nicaragua to the north and Panama to the south, Costa Rica is a peaceful democracy with a size approximately midway between Maryland and West Virginia (for those of you familiar with the United States). Although the official language is Spanish, many Ticos (Costa Ricans) speak at least some English. In the tourist areas, English speakers are common, since well over half the visitors to the country come from English-speaking nations (54% from the USA alone - <http://costarica-information.com/about-costa-rica/economy/economic-sectors-industries/tourism/tourism-statistics>).

Costa Rica also has great biodiversity, with more than 500,000 species. That's nearly 4% of the total estimated species in the world. Of these 500,000, just over 300,000 are insects. To help preserve this great variety of life, over 25% of Costa Rica's territory is under protection, although there are different categories of protection used in different areas.

Costa Rica is located about ten degrees north of the Equator, so the climate is tropical. In general, the rainy season is May through November, with the dry season December through April. However, there are microclimates throughout the country depending on elevation, topography, and geography.

If you're planning a trip to Costa Rica, I recommend researching the weather for the specific area(s) you will visit. For example: "In Guanacaste, the arid northwestern province, the dry season lasts several weeks longer than in other places. Even in the rainy season, days often start sunny, with rain falling in the afternoon and evening." - from <https://www.frommers.com/destinations/costa-rica/when-to-go>

Guanacaste is the only province I've visited. The province is named for the guanacaste tree (also known as the ear pod tree) which is the national tree of Costa Rica.



Guanacaste tree (Image from <https://www.costarica.com/culture/national-tree/>)

Guanacaste province is 5,921 sq. miles (15,335 sq. kilometers) in size, with more than 400 miles (644 kilometers) of coast line, and inland mountains/volcanos. There are seven national parks in Guanacaste. The two main commercial areas are Santa Cruz and Liberia, with five [tourism](#) development centers: Papagayo, El Coco, Flamingo, Conchal, and Tamarindo. The two places I've visited are Flamingo and Conchal.

About Guanacaste Beaches

From previous research I've conducted, it seems that the beaches in Guanacaste are varied. It can be difficult to find solid information, but if you research carefully you'll find reviews that say things like "...Playa Brasilito, is a two kilometer (1.2 mile) stretch of gray sand. It isn't Guanacaste's prettiest beach..." - from <https://www.twoweeksincostarica.com/playa-brasilito/>

All of the beaches in Costa Rica are public. So if you stay at a beach resort, you will leave the resort property to go onto the beach. At Playa Conchal, there are several beach vendors who vie for your attention to hawk their goods and services. They were all friendly and polite, but they did want to make certain you knew they were there. Many reviewers have nice things to say about the beach vendors, and some were upset that the Westin tries to discourage you from doing business with them. I encourage you to do your own research and draw your own conclusions, but I will say that my wife made several purchases on the beach and was completely satisfied with both the products and the vendors.



Playa Conchal beach vendor

The two beaches I've visited in Guanacaste were nice. Playa Flamingo was sandy. Playa Conchal (translation: "Shell Beach") was a mix of sand and shells, although there seem to be fewer shells the farther south you go on the beach.



Playa Flamingo, 2010



Playa Conchal beach shells & sand, 2017

About The Westin



Image on left from www.westinplayaconchal.com

Before it was a Westin, the resort was the Paradisus. [It became a Westin in 2011.](#)

The resort sits on 2,400 acres (971 hectares) of land, although the golf course takes up a big chunk of that. Still, the resort area is spacious, so much so that there are motor carts to take you from place to place. You can call (or have a resort employee call) to have one pick you up, you can wait for one at a common stopping point (the lobby, the Mitra restaurant, etc.), or you can flag one down as it passes by.

Of course, you can always walk or use the bicycles they provide to get from place to place. While I was there, the weather was mostly hot and humid, and my wife and I were in the building farthest from the beach and restaurants (building 20), so we would often ride the carts.

When you arrive, you check in at the lobby:



Lobby and view from the lobby

The lobby is at the east end of the resort, while the beach is at the west end. Most of the restaurants and shops, along with the main pool, are near the beach. The larger suites, and the suites with additional amenities (like enclosed patios) are also closest to the beach.



The main pool (yes, there is a swim-up bar)

There is an activity center next to the pool where you can check out equipment for the tennis courts, pool tables, ping pong tables, etc. They also have scheduled activities. I won a bag of Costa Rican coffee playing bingo.

Because the resort is so large, it can take awhile to learn how to find everything. There are signs along the paths to help you find your way around.





Sign, sign, everywhere a sign

The resort is so large, there is another resort inside it. The Royal Beach Club is an adults-only area with its own rooms, pool, and restaurant. There's also a family-only area with a kid's club, and a family-only section at the main pool.

The main shopping on the resort is the Britt Shop (<https://www.brittshop.com/>). There is also a small covered area a short walk from the activity center where souvenirs are sold, as well as the aforementioned beach vendors. You can purchase items with USA dollars, but your change will likely be in Costa Rica colons.

There is a booth at the point where you exit the resort to enter the beach. This is where you can check out beach gear.

There is a tour company downstairs in the lobby where you can purchase a variety of tours. There are also beach vendors selling tours: on TripAdvisor, several reviewers have specifically mentioned their satisfaction with the tours provided by Eric Garcia. I also heard that you can take a tour of the resort in golf carts if and when a pro in the golf shop is available to lead them.

There is a stage next to the Mitra restaurant where a show is performed most evenings. The shows vary from night to night.

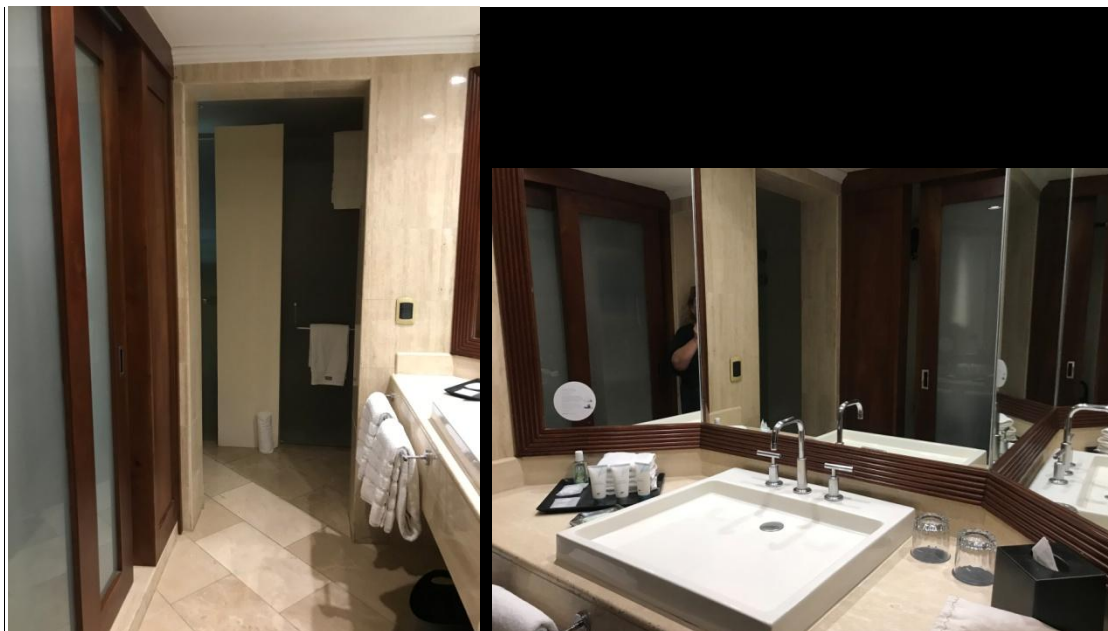
There are icemakers scattered throughout the grounds. The resort map shows you where they are. Your room comes with a small ice bucket.

The rooms are described as suites, although the bedroom is not separate (at least not in the room we were assigned). In that room, called a Deluxe Junior Suite, the bed area was elevated but not closed off. The suite consisted of the elevated bedroom, a sitting area (sofa and coffee table), a desk, a table & chairs next to a bar with coffee/tea/refrigerator/sink, a hallway with a sink/counter on one side and closet on the other, a shower and toilet at the end of the hallway, and a patio. The electrical outlets were 110 volt 2-prong, so my USA phone charger worked without any problems.

Rooms have either basic or premium wifi. If a room comes with basic wifi, you can pay to upgrade to premium. For my purposes (email, a little bit of social media) the basic wifi was fine.



Photo by Dana Browne



There's no door between the hall and the toilet/shower area. The sink isn't very deep either.

There are animals on the resort. While walking the paths, I saw ducks, coati, squirrel, and iguana. Some folks in my group took a tour and saw many other animals.



Ducks and coati and squirrel and iguana, oh my!



My wife didn't have to go anywhere to see the wildlife. She was sitting on the patio and birds would come right up to her.



Patio birds

There are also insects on the resort (you did read the earlier section that mentioned the 300,000+ species of insects, didn't you?). Thanks to reviews left by previous travelers, we brought both insect repellent for our bodies, and bug spray for the room. Both were needed.

Although my wife and I were protected by our repellent, I heard others at the resort talking about how they were being bitten all the time.

In our suite, every day army ants would enter the bathroom. With the spray we brought we were able to control (but not stop) them. The ants would enter, we would spray, the ants would die, the cleaning crew would clean them out, the ants would enter....it was a never-ending cycle. Another person in our group had the same issue but didn't bring any spray. He bought some at the resort, and it was very expensive.

One reason there are so many insects is the abundance of plants and flowers.



Two of many varieties of flowers on the resort

And of course, the tropical weather contributes to the great variety of plant, animal, and insect life. I was there in early November, which is the end of the rainy season. Although the weather was hot and humid, there was far less rain than I expected, with a couple of brief showers and one rain that lasted maybe an hour.



Most of the time the sky looked like this during November 2-6, 2017

There are several bars and restaurants on the resort, pretty much all near the beach, although there's a bar and a restaurant in the lobby. The food ranged from good to terrific. Not all of the restaurants were open when we were there.

The Mitra is the buffet restaurant, and usually has a good variety of food, along with an omelette station in the morning.

There's a small hut at the south end of the pool that you can walk up to in your wet bathing suit and grab a bite to eat. At the other restaurants you need to be dry, and in various levels of attire depending on the restaurant.

The staff was awesome. Everyone was nice and some went above and beyond to be helpful.

And finally, although this review is about the Westin, just a stone's throw away is [The Beach Chocolate Factory](#), where we learned to make our own chocolate. And that's a tasty way to end this review.

