

REVIEW: A little slice of heaven – Andaz Papagayo

Staying at this hotel was one of the best experiences I have had in a while. I know, it may sound like hyperbole, but the Andaz really knows how to do things right when it comes to their resort in Costa Rica. I was lucky enough to stay here during low season which turned out to be a blessing in disguise as the resort was exceptionally placid and relaxing with only a few people around.



This is the view that you'll be seeing every morning as you have an amazing breakfast

One of the first things you'll notice when you enter the

Papagayo Peninsula and then the Andaz is just how secluded it all is. Costa Rica, in general is already a getaway, but at the Andaz the buildings just meld into their environment making guests feel at one with the nature around them. When I was choosing whether to stay at this hotel, or the Four Seasons down the street I decided upon the Andaz due to its newer build and more zen-like atmosphere. I did get a chance to visit the Four Seasons one night and my decision, in retrospect, was correct.

There's a lot of things to love about this property, its direct beach access and water-based activities, including jet-skiing, snorkeling, paddle-boarding, and snorkeling, to its beautiful set of infinity edge pools that span across the entire width of the resort. What I love most about the hotel, however, was the fact that the management has spent a lot of time training the staff to make you feel as if you were an old friend, and valued guest. This is especially important when you're at a secluded resort and spend a significant amount of time on the property.



Modern, relaxing, and awesomely integrated into the mountainside – Big ups to the Andaz hotel chain for this one!

The staff went out of their way at each moment to know the names of the guests, to know my personal preferences in drinks and food, and to impart some personal tidbits about Costa Rica – once they knew it was my first time there. The concierge was extremely helpful in planning activities, and one of my favorite things about the resort was the mixology bar and the mixologists on staff. The complexity and innovation that went into some of the beverages that the staff made for me was almost incomprehensible (yes, it's that good).



They take mixology to a whole 'nother level here. I really can't begin to describe how amazing the drinks are at the Andad Papagayo

The spirit of "Pura Vida" (Google it, because that's a whole 'nother article in itself), is especially prevalent here, and I cannot hesitate to recommend this as a must-see and must-stay at property if you're ever in Costa Rica.

PROS:

- Beautiful modern property with amazing rooms/bathrooms, it's a lot newer than the more expensive Four Seasons next door, and a lovely property
- The service is bar-none. I would put it at the same level as a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, which is saying a lot
- All the awesome activities were put together with lots of planning and thought, the mixology classes, coffee classes, forest hikes – you won't feel at a loss when

finding things to do here

- The food is incredible, lots of amazing cuisine for vegetarians to meat lovers alike

CONS:

- Some of the restaurants were closed on certain days due to it being low season, but that ended up not being an issue as there were shuttles to the Four Seasons next door when added variety was needed

SECRETS:

- Check out the adults-only pool next to the spa, it's got a nice secluded atmosphere to it
- The ceviche at Ostra is incredible and a must have

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- I highly recommend the ATV tours through the company that Andaz's concierge uses, it's a fun adventure through rivers and rainforest that shows some of the beauty of Costa Rica (hidden waterfalls, local towns, etc)

REVIEW: The Ritz-Carlton Dove Mountain



The Dove Mountain Ritz-Carlton is a pretty awesome place to visit. The resort is a large property set in the side of Dove Mountain with lots of cool nooks and crannies to explore. The

feel is that of a modern hunting lodge, with high ceilings, large rooms with expansive views, and a rustic quality and vibe.

The Ritz here spent a lot of time and energy developing local activities such as sunset hikes, a traditional Native-American ceremony on certain days, and even outdoor games and a tangerine orchard.



A hunting lodge you ask? Ritz-Carlton has their interpretation of it here at Dove Mountain

My personal favorite area of the hotel, though, is the pool.

There's multiple decks, amazing views of the landscape around the hotel, and even a waterslide – if you feel so inclined.



Check out that waterslide!

Everything about this Ritz is a bit more special, and it reminds me a lot of a Ritz-Carlton Reserve. The service is a slight notch above the other properties, and the build quality of the hotel itself is higher. If you love the desert, I highly recommend visiting this property for a nice weekend getaway!

PROS:

- It's one of the nicer Ritz-Carltons in the chain – similar in feel to a Reserve
- It has lots to offer on the grounds and a wilderness center where you can book hikes and enjoy some really awesome desert activities

CONS:

- It's quite a far drive from anything in the Tucson area

SECRETS:

- Check the events calendar or call before you book.

There's usually lots planned and it's a smart move to book your stay around special events to take advantage of them

- The sushi is also really good here, trust me on this

OTHER THINGS TO DO:

- Biosphere 2 is a really cool biosphere habitat that is basically one of two in the world (as the name suggests). If you're in the area you should definitely check it out!