

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: A peek into the SOHO Beach House in Miami

There's nothing quite as relaxing as tropical climates where a constant breeze keeps the sweat from building up and you can find some shade and a view. The SOHO Beach House in Miami is one of those spots.

From the minute you enter the building (located right next to the legendary Fontainebleau) there is a feeling of secrecy.

After all, this is home of the SOHO club, known internationally as hidden lounges reserved for celebrities and well-heeled folk. You walk into the hidden check-in area where reception whisks you into an even more hidden (and velvet lined) elevator.

The best part of this hotel is the decor. It's eclectic and feels like something that someone might put together for their own house. It's a mishmash of items with a beachside bungalow feel. I wouldn't have thought that leather chairs with reclaimed wood and outdoor cushions would feel at home inside a hotel room but for the SOHO Beach House it all works well.



The best part of this hotel though is the property itself, namely the upstairs spaces, and all the little nooks and crannies of the SOHO Beach House members-only property. As a matter of fact, if you're not a member of SOHO House this is the only way you're going to get into this place short of being invited by a friend.

There's a movie screening room, an upstairs hot-tub, a

smallish pool, and dedicated beach access with chaises for hotel guests. The anchor restaurant in the hotel is of course Cecconis, similar to the SOHO House in Los Angeles and definitely worth a visit. Everything about the decor of this property is charming, upscale, and incredibly detailed. It's got a whimsical touch to it and I definitely think it's a great alternative to your standard faire in South Beach (as there's so many options there).



Check out the wood tub, the exposed brass piping, and the wicker baskets for towels and bath accessories

PROS:

- Impeccably decorated with a great beach vibe. This place really stands out and has character and charm
- Incredible rooftop deck which is great for a romantic retreat or just relaxing with your favorite beverage.

- Each room is different from the others which gives it a bed and breakfast type of experience (if that's your type of thing)

CONS:

- The service was not very good. It took multiple calls to get some extra soap and towels, and unlike many small boutique luxury properties, the staff doesn't go out of their way to know your name or particular preferences.
- The pool area is relatively small and covered by the trees and high walls of the building on either side, making it hard to catch some rays or to find an available lounge chaise.

SECRETS:

- Ask the front desk to send a bartender to your room for happy hour. There's a full bar set including fresh fruits, bitters, and assorted mixers on the bar cart in the room and bartenders on staff will come to your room to make drinks for you as you get ready for your night out on the town!

OTHER STUFF IN TOWN:

- With the caveat that i've been to Miami well over 30+ times one thing that always stands out to me (And still my favorite hotel in Miami) is the Setai. It's the pinnacle of luxury in South beach and has been since it's inception. I really enjoy a speciality martini they make there called the "Chili Passion Martini".
Enjoy it in the lobby of the Setai which is decorated with manta ray skin-lined walls and teak wood imported from Indonesia. I always make a stop here when i'm in Miami.

