

## Costa Rica's North Pacific Coast Beaches

Costa Rica is blessed with beautiful playas (beaches) on every coast. The beaches of the North Pacific Coast are especially fortunate to have a variety of settings, surf conditions, sand colors and compositions, and, of course, a spectacular sunset almost everyday. They were also mostly undiscovered until recent years when the opening of Costa Rica's second international airport at Liberia revealed the North Pacific Coast to the world. The prior decades of relative inaccessibility to tourists, have left them with an unspoiled character and few regular visitors. They are waiting for you to discover them for yourself.

*(We would like to give credit to Lonely Planet and [www.1-costaricalink.com](http://www.1-costaricalink.com) for portions of our Beaches page content.)*

### TAMARINDO AREA

The area around Tamarindo (check our map) is one of the fastest growing resort locations in all of Costa Rica. Its local airport, where cattle still need to be drawn off the runways at times, has become Costa Rica's 4<sup>th</sup> busiest. The beaches of Tamarindo, Langosta, Avellanas, Grande, and Ventanas await you.

### PLAYA TAMARINDO

Tamarindo is a rapidly growing beach resort area and in the last three years has eclipsed all others on Costa Rica's North Pacific Coast in the level of services, amenities, tourist attractions, accommodations and nightlife. The town of Tamarindo sits in the middle of a wide, arcing, beige sand beach.

A construction boom is continuing and will soon leave Tamarindo with 5 banks, two hardware stores, multiple restaurants, numerous accommodations, bars, discos, souvenir and surf shops, and small grocery stores. It's a great destination for anyone that wants to do anything recreational in the ocean or simply enjoy the beach and the sun, by day, and then turn to a full evening of resort activities by night.

The beach extends for two kilometers between Punto San Francisco on the South and Matapalo River Estuary, exactly at the southern limit of las Baulas Marine National Park. It is a place made up of large extensions of clear sand beaches surrounded by Savannah Oak, Tamarindo and Coconut trees.

Both surfing and windsurfing are good, and there is a wildlife refuge and marine national park nearby. The beach is large enough that nonsurfers can still find quiet stretches. Parts of the beach have rip currents or barely submerged rocks, so make local inquiries before swimming. This beach has good access to public

transportation and is bustling with small scale development. During the dry months, February's winds can make the beach a bit gritty.

Tamarindo became known as a surf town after its beach was featured in the film, "Endless Summer II". There are good waves at the river estuary north of town and at Playa Grande across the estuary. There's some surfing right off Playa Tamarindo, but the rocks make for limited space. Playa Langosta, a couple of kilometers south of Tamarindo, is a favorite uninhabited surfing beach. Sea kayaking is also good. About 6 km to 7 km farther south is Playa Avellanas.

#### Information for Surfers:

Tamarindo has two main points: Pico Pequeño a rocky point in front of the Hotel Tamarindo Diriá and the excellent river mouth break called El Estero.

#### PLAYA LANGOSTA

Playa Langosta is the most exclusive residential area of Tamarindo and is located on its southern edge. It can be reached by vehicle along dirt roads from the center of Tamarindo, or by walking along the shoreline to the south from "the Circle". The brilliant waves and wind invite all for surfing and wind-surfing. There is a wildlife refuge and a marine national park. The beach is large enough that nonsurfers will easily find quiet stretches. Parts of the beach have rip-currents and barely submerged rocks, so make local inquiries before swimming.

#### Information for Surfers:

This beach offers a right and left point break that curls off the mouth of a small river.

#### PLAYA AVELLANAS

Playa Avellanas is a popular surfing beach. Avellanas is a long stretch of white sand about 15 km south of Tamarindo by road, but closer to 10 km if you walk in along the beaches, about 5 km to the north of Playa Negra, north of Playa Junquillal. There are few amenities, but there is a popular beach restaurant.

#### Information for Surfers:

Here you'll find both left and right breaks, 8 different surf breaks, reef, sand or beach breaks with rocky points and a good beach break called 'Guanacasteco' with very hollow rights and lefts, along a three kilometer long stretch of beach. Surfing is best at mid or high tides

#### PLAYA GRANDE

Playa Grande lies immediately north and west of Playa Tamarindo and is really the continuation of the same arcing beach. It is divided from Playa Tamarindo by the estuary of the Matapalo River, which can be forded on foot at times of low tide. Please be careful, as crocodiles do inhabit the river, but usually not near the ocean.

Even though Playa Grande is a short walk from Playa Tamarindo, it can be a 30 minute ride in a vehicle. The lack of any bridges over the river forces people to drive all the way back to Huacas (see our map) to move from one beach to the other by road.

Grande, as a town, has far fewer amenities than Tamarindo, but its feeling of remoteness is appealing to many vacationers. Currently, questions about development hang over Grande, because of the government's active interest in preserving the shoreline and turtle nesting areas.

The Grande beach is where leatherback turtles come to lay their eggs. The leatherbacks take over the beach from November to April. They dig their nests one meter deep, lay their eggs and cover the pit with sand, returning once again to the sea. After 60 to 90 days, the hatchlings emerge and immediately make their way back to the water. Along the treacherous path, which measures only a few meters, they are easy prey for crabs, seabirds and various mammals, which means only a few of them are able to survive. Sometimes Pacific Ridley turtles also arrive to nest as they do at Santa Ana and Corcovado National Park.

This sea turtle can measure up to 2.5 meters and weigh around 700 kilos. Unlike other turtles, this species has no hard shell, but rather a black, leathery skin with ridges running lengthwise. It is the epitome of a nomad and its favorite food is the poisonous jellyfish. Like all other sea turtles, the leatherback spends its life in the warm, tropical seas, coming ashore only when the females nest.

## PLAYA VENTANAS

Playa Ventanas lies just outside of the Las Baulas National Marine Park next to Playa Grande from where one can reach Ventanas beach as well as Playa Carbón. Nearby Cerro El Mono can be climbed being bordered by platforms and rocky cliffs, in which in low tide, it is possible to observe colorful small fishes.

## PLAYA CONCHAL AREA

The beaches near Conchal were first recognized as truly special by the developers of the 2500-acre Reserva Conchal mixed-use residential project. It is a growing complex that includes the 5-star Hotel Paradisus Melia all-inclusive vacation

resort, condominiums, private homes, golf courses, and much more. The Reserva Conchal property completely surrounds the beach at Conchal, but access is afforded to the public (on foot or by a 4 wheel drive) from neighboring Playa Brasilito.

## PLAYA CONCHAL

At Playa Conchal, so called for the many *conchas* (shells) that pile up on the beach, the sand is made up of millions of crushed shells that constitute a rare environment. Conchal is also the most common name given to a pretty sweep of bay beginning about 2 km south of Brasilito. The clear water makes for nice snorkeling. Many swimmers and sunbathers believe that Playa Conchal is the most beautiful beach on the entire Pacific Coast for its sand, water and views to the northern coast. Playa Brasilito and Conchal make up a unit separated by the rock headlands of Punta Conchal.

## PLAYA BRASILITO

The main attraction of the 2 km long Playa Brasilito Beach is its closeness to Playa Conchal. By traveling south from Brasilito, you can reach Playa Conchal by walking or driving over a rocky path at the end of Playa Brasilito. It is important to be mindful of tidal schedules as high tides can block the way.

Playa Brasilito is a wide grey sand beach that draws few regular visitors, because Playa Conchal is so close. The town of Brasilito has many "beachgoer" amenities for those passing through. There is a program of building demolitions underway in Brasilito, as the national government is enforcing development restrictions near the shoreline. Brasilito will undoubtedly evolve past this period of change as economic pressures increase its future attractiveness to investors.

## FLAMINGO AREA

The Flamingo area was actually popular years before Tamarindo made its recent rise to prominence. As Tamarindo made gains, people started to look past Flamingo and it declined. The time has come again for Flamingo and many of the reasons it was attractive in years past are now apparent to travelers and investors. The beaches of Flamingo, Surfside, Potrero, Penca, Prieta, and Pan de Azucar are again ready to receive you.

## PLAYA FLAMINGO

This beautiful white sandy beach is nestled between two peninsulas embracing Flamingo Bay. The beach is a corridor of white sand flanked by low altitude hills. From the shore one can see the small island called Plata.

The cliffs of Punta Salinas and the rocky headlands are the littoral areas where the fauna and flora lives. There are few other areas in the world where can you lie on a beautiful white sand beach, swim safely in the surf on the mighty Pacific Ocean, catch world class game fish, go on a sunset cruise, walk to restaurants and bars feeling safe, and have an 18 hole championship golf course designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr. within a five minute drive. Sport-fishermen know that Flamingo is only minutes away from the Catalinas rock formations that are home to Wahoo, yellow fin tuna, Dorado, roosterfish, snapper, grouper and more. This long stretch of beaches is ideal for relaxing and sunbathing.

#### PLAYA POTRERO and SURFSIDE

Potrero Bay is immediately north of Flamingo and looks back at it. Playa Potrero and Surfside are the first grey fine sand beaches on the bay. The calm waters are perfect for swimming, boating, and fishing. Potrero is a small fisher village located in the center of the beach. It is also becoming the community that lies at the gateway of new resort territories to the north.

After Potrero follow the existing beaches Penca, Prieta, and Pan de Azucar (Sugar) to the north. The road after Sugar Beach becomes a little rough, but intrepid beachgoers (with 4 wheel drive) can find special spots with total privacy most days of the week. Please be sure to drive on safe terrain and be mindful of tidal schedules. The Potrero Bay beaches are bordered to the west by the hills and cliffs of Punta Salinas, to the south by Flamingo, and to the north by the cliffs of Punta Ostional. Beyond there are three estuaries: Cacao, Plantanar, and Salinas, the latter covered with saltwater forests.

#### PLAYA PENCA

This secluded, beautiful beach is less than 1 km long has clear sands, relatively rough waves and features a mangrove swamp. It is a blue-flag beach located between Playa Potrero and Sugar Beach at a distance of about 4 km from Playa Flamingo. You can access it by turning left at the first road after the Potrero soccer field as you head in the direction of Sugar Beach. New development has begun in this area, but Playa Penca's unique sense of intimacy will never change.

#### PLAYA PRIETA

This white fine sand beach and its calm waters are perfect for swimming and fishing. Playa Prieta is further along the road to Sugar Beach after Playa Penca. The beach is encompassed to the west by the hills and cliffs of Punta Salinas, to the south by Playa Penca, and to the north by the cliffs of Punta Ostional. Beyond

there are three estuaries: Cacao, Plantanar, and Salinas, the latter covered with saltwater forests.

#### PLAYA PAN de AZUCAR

Playa Pan de Azúcar (Sugar Beach) is located at the end of the graded road as you head north and west out of Potrero. The Sugar Beach Hotel sits on part of this beach, but there is a dirt parking area accessible from the road beyond the hotel. Sugar Beach is a short beach of less than 1 km in length but its grey/white sand is exceptionally beautiful. Sugar Beach lies at the foot of a coastal range of volcanic rock that dates from the Tertiary Era 60-80 million years ago.

Here one can walk along the entire coastline and admire the marine life. The Pitahayas Islets, which measure 0.75 hectares and lie just off the coast, and the Santa Catalina Island, which has 19 hectares, lies 4 km to the southwest, near Salinas Point.