Tips From a AAA Travel Advisor: Autumn Long

Costa Rica stands out among destinations

Resorts, beaches, sights make Caribbean location a winner

AAA Travel Advisor: Autumn Long

After working for US Airways, TSA and Southwest, I was looking for a career change after the pandemic. Travel is my passion, so I accepted a position as a AAA Travel Advisor. What is my favorite destination? The three I's: Ireland, Ireland, Ireland.

But the most popular vacations I book daily are trips to warm destinations like Mexico, the Caribbean and Costa Rica! This September, I was happy to return to Costa Rica with a coach full of travel professionals to do hotel site inspections. Seeing so many properties first-hand provided invaluable insights when recommending properties to our members.

We flew into Liberia airport and stayed at the Secrets Papagayo Resort – a stunning all-inclusive property with lush gardens on the gulf. The resort is large and hilly with a black-sand beach. It's a great getaway for clients who want an adults-only resort. It's a large spread-out property, not suitable if you have mobility issues. We also toured the nearby Planet Hollywood, which is an all-ages getaway with a party atmosphere.

BEACH BUM – Palm trees, nicely manicured landscaping and a pristine beach hug the blue waters of the Caribbean Sea in Costa Rica. *Image: Autumn Long. AAA*

Farther north, we toured Dreams Las Mareas in popular Guanacaste near the tropical rainforest. Dreams caters to couples and families. Rooms are decorated with natural-wood tones to complement the natural landscape. It was easy to get around and the property had a white-sand beach. My favorite resort experience was watching the loveable monkeys swinging high in the Guanacaste trees. Nearby activities included whitewater rafting and hiking in the rainforest.

Also in Guanacaste is the Westin Reserve Conchal, a golf and tennis resort with a lagoon-style pool. It's a quieter resort and it provides golf carts. The only downside to me was the vendors on the beach, but the shoppers liked it! Next door is the upscale W Hotel Reserva Conchal, with its unique rooms, including the stunning Sunset Treehouse Room, with views of the mangrove forest from your private balcony!

What was my favorite and most unexpected experience? Tamarindo. We toured the Tamarindo Diria – one of the most iconic beach resorts. This charming resort is on Costa Rica's most famous beach, so you can enjoy 1.8 miles of white sand just a few steps from your room.

My choice for romance, celebrations and honeymoons is the Casa Chameleon at Las Catalinas. The rooms are spacious with plunge pools and the food is out of this world. They also have a wine cellar.

We toured the Mistico Hanging Bridges and did a Jungle cruise, but my sightseeing highlight was seeing Arenal Volcano and the Hot Springs. Arenal Springs Resort and Spa is an active resort with an animal sanctuary, rock-climbing wall, and river for rafting and tubing, along with the hot springs. My overall favorite hot-spring experience was at the Tabacon Thermal Resort and Spa. The hotel was separate from the spring down the road. The property was huge with dozens of pools.

My tips for your trip are to bring B.D.P – Bug Spray, Dramamine and Patience. The road infrastructure is winding and some are gravel and rough. It takes longer than expected to get where you are going. And do a guided tour, so your guide can navigate the roads and point out the animals along the way!

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Thanksgiving Holiday
CLOSED
Thursday, November 23 and Friday, November 24
(all offices will resume normal operating hours Saturday, November 25)

Christmas Holiday
CLOSED
Monday, December 25
(all Branch offices will reopen Tuesday, December 26)

New Year's Holiday
CLOSED
Monday, January 1
(all Branch offices will reopen Tuesday, January 2)