



COSTA RICA

## Silent Green

Eco-luxury breaks new ground—with a lighter touch BY COSTAS CHRIST



■ AN UNUSUAL SOUND can be heard in Costa Rica these days. Joining the monkey chatter and macaw squawks is the clamor of condo resorts and international hotels going up along the coasts. But San José native Eduardo Villafranca is proving that silence is golden. “The future is not the place we are heading, but rather what we construct in the present,” says the sustainable developer. The 16 suites of his planet-friendly El Silencio Lodge & Spa, set deep in the central highlands, honor Costa Rica’s green legacy

(they were built on raised platforms to minimize impact) while upgrading it with private plunge pools, high thread counts, and an organic menu (\$210, including meals; *elsilenciolodge.com*). The lodge is staffed with personal eco-concierges who can arrange a hard push up nearby 8,871-foot Poás volcano (\$45 per person), a birding amble along La Promesa Waterfall trail (\$30 per person) in search of the long-tailed, iridescent green quetzal—revered by the Aztecs as a symbol of goodness and light—as well as the old standards: horseback riding, rafting, and kayaking. But El Silencio’s playlist includes something few resorts can match: solitude in unspoiled nature.

► **MUST-DO:** To trade the highland hush for a few days of crashing waves, hop a 45-minute flight from San José to the Osa Peninsula (\$222 round-trip; *natureair.com*), where dirt tracks lead through jungle to hidden surf breaks and perfect beaches that haven’t become construction sites—yet.

**ANGLE OF REPOSE:** El Silencio’s luxury suites keep watch over a private 500-acre reserve.



## MORE LUXE OUTPOSTS



PERU

### The Amazon Queen

Taking high-end upstream

■ EXPLORING THE HEADWATERS of the Amazon has never been a pleasure cruise: Few boats are capable of making the trip, and riverside lodging is virtually nonexistent. Enter the new M/V *Aqua*, a 130-foot, 12-suite expedition ship now navigating the flooded rain forest of northern Peru in style (\$1,950 per person for four days, including meals; *aquaexpeditions.com*). “We designed it as a floating base camp staffed with expert naturalists,” says *Aqua* CEO Francesco Galli Zugaro. Small skiffs take passengers deeper into the five-million-acre Pacaya Samiria National Reserve for face time with the locals: pint-size tamarins and pink river dolphins.



JAPAN

### Goodbye Kitty, Hello Zen

Old-style endures outside Tokyo

■ FLASHING NEON AND 24-HOUR pachinko parlors typify Japan’s modern scene, but enclaves of the country’s ancient Shinto heritage still exist beyond city limits. Among them is Myojinkan Ryokan, a traditional inn just three bullet-train hours from Tokyo (\$296, including meals; *ryokan collection.com*). The 77-year-old refuge rises from terraced rice paddies on the edge of Yatsugatake National Park and accesses a web of trails that wind up the slopes of Honshu Island’s North Alps. From the Setsugekka Onsen, one of Myojinkan’s four natural hot springs, the only bright lights blinking at night are directly overhead.