

DREAMSCAPES

TRAVEL AND LIFESTYLE

Winter 2024/2025

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Blue Zone *by Nature*

A Peek Inside Las Catalinas, Costa Rica

BY DONNA S. VIEIRA

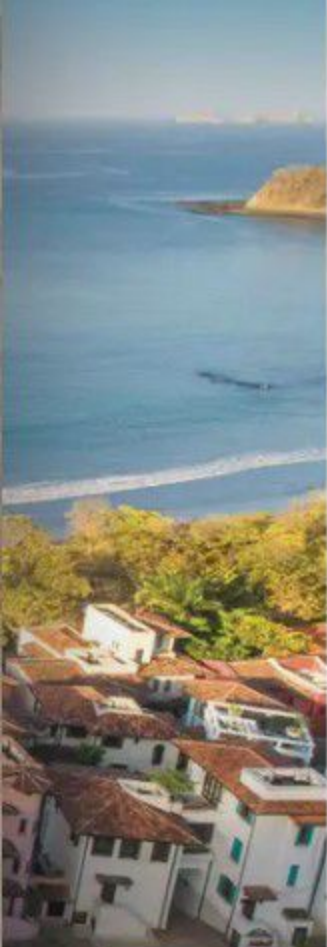
The 2023 release of the Netflix documentary, *Live to 100: Secrets of the Blue Zone*, sparked worldwide interest in longevity and the fountain of youth. Earth's five Blue Zones share similar elements, which have been proven to promote longevity and health among residents—moving naturally, putting family and friends first, slowing down and reducing stress, the benefits of a plant-slant diet, and being part of a tribe.

Living Well in Las Catalinas

Costa Rica's Nicoya Peninsula is one such designated Blue Zone, and the purposely designed, mostly car-free coastal town of Las Catalinas sits

at its northern border. When the town's founder, Charles Brewer, purchased 485 hectares in 2006, he had a clear vision: "Create a vibrant, ungated community centered around a balanced lifestyle, where health, sustainability, fun, work and fulfillment converge harmoniously."

Construction of Beach Town, a showcase of Mediterranean architecture with stairways and pedestrian-only walkways, began in 2010. Since then, more than 100 units featuring an assortment of homes, condos and apartments have been built with another 500 under development. The remaining land is reserved for nature and 32 kilometres of trails for residents and guests to enjoy.



As a leader in the movement to build highly walkable neighbourhoods, towns and cities, Las Catalinas' adopted concept of "Well-Living at Las Catalinas" parallels the Blue Zone lifestyle pillars. With cars gone, people spend more time outdoors, generating opportunities for spontaneous interactions, conversations and impromptu get-togethers.

In 2022, The Congress for New Urbanism celebrated Beach Town, the first neighbourhood within Las Catalinas, with a Charter Award recognizing the town's achievement in "designing a more equitable, sustainable, connected, healthy and prosperous community."

A Fountain of Youth

While Las Catalinas has a resort feel to it, it is a fully functioning town. As we walked about, children's voices filled the air. It was recess time at the Montessori preschool and what better place to enjoy playtime than at the beach.

You'll find a grocery store, restaurants, an outdoor gym, a furniture store, spa services, as well as medical, dental and legal offices. For the active crowd, consider paddleboard, snorkelling, yoga and whale watching, to name a few activities. Las Catalinas even hosted the annual triathlon, XTERRA, earlier this year, hoping to make it a regular event.

Words do not describe the splendour and attention to detail I observed at each property we visited. I couldn't help but feel the town provided the perfect backdrop for a storybook destination wedding.

A Feast of Blue Zone Delicacies

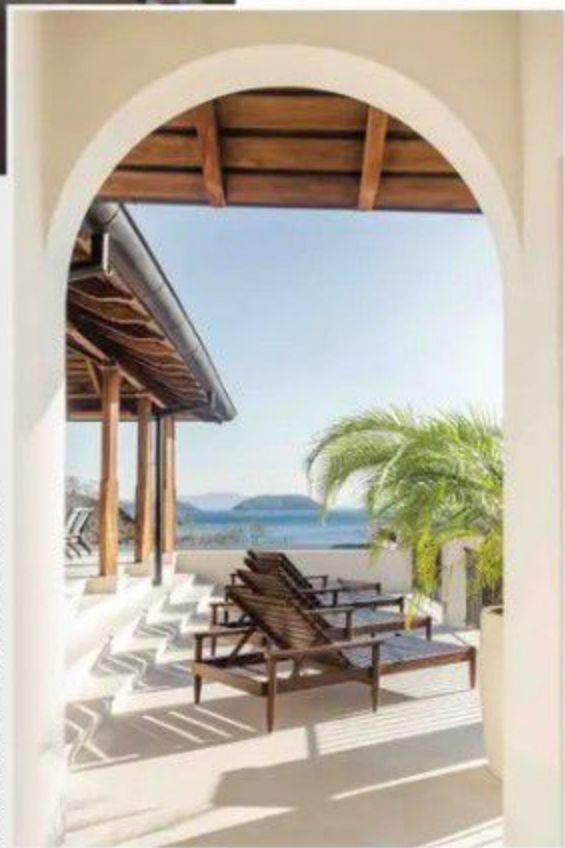
By mealtime, we had worked up quite an appetite, and the tasting menu at the Restaurant Ponciana in the Santarena Hotel was the perfect place to sample Chef Frederico Lizano's culinary delights. Having recently returned from France where he worked with Michelin-star chefs, he was brimming with ideas and eager to experiment with Costa Rica's Blue Zone produce.

An amuse-bouche featuring wagyu beef from a local farm was followed by a delicious mushroom harvest from the northern mountain area. Next, a perfectly cooked egg (at 63 C for 16 minutes) was served with a corn purée and sweet potato chips, seasoned with ancho chili pepper, roasted garlic and onion. The wahoo sashimi came with a homemade ponzu sauce of lime, soya sauce and sesame seeds, topped with avocado and burnt onion. The fresh catch-of-the-day dish featured pan-seared snapper served with mashed sweet potato and fresh herb butter drizzle. We could not believe the lobster bisque that followed. Chef Frederico explained he used a lobster head for his bouillabaisse, which enhanced the flavour giving it a strong, but noble, flavour. Our sixth, and final, plate was a demi-glaze wagyu ribeye soaked in red wine for 72 hours and served with roasted beans and chanterelles.

Our meal was a culinary exclamation mark to our day, and considering the luxurious properties we had the privilege to tour, that is saying something! 🍷

TRAVEL PLANNER

Air Canada (aircanada.com) flies non-stop from several Canadian gateways to Liberia International, about an hour's drive from Las Catalinas (lascatalinas.cr). A nine-course tasting menu at Ponciana costs about US\$200 per couple.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF LAS CATALINAS | DONNA S. VIEIRA