

# Buenos Aires Attracts with Its Diversity

PETER LOWY

A grand city in the European style – with tree lined streets, numerous parks and plazas, outdoor cafes, wide boulevards, and perhaps the most diverse architecture found in any city – Buenos Aires is a sensory treat.

Considered by many as the cultural capital of South America, Buenos Aires is friendly, welcoming, multicultural, and never seems to sleep – which is probably why, in 2007 and 2008, it garnered the Conde Nast Traveler's Readers Choice Awards as the top city to visit in South America.

North Americans in recent years have accounted for about 10% of tourists visiting Argentina's capital, with the number of arrivals from the U.S. and Canada in 2008 up about 5.5% over 2007.

Situated on the Rio de la Plata, the widest river in the world, this city of 13 million offers an appealing climate year-round. Buenos Aires is a feature-filled, affordable destination at any time, and may have special appeal for tourists looking to escape the cold northern winter but who want more than a beach vacation.

The cuisine of Buenos Aires is astonishingly varied. The justly famous Argentine beef, of course, tops the menu, most particularly asado – wood-fired, barbecued beef. As befits a world capital, Spanish, Italian, German, French fare and new fusion styles such as Peruvian-Japanese are readily available.

In advance of next year's 200th anniversary of Argentina's May Revolution, Buenos Aires is undertaking many improvements, including the complete renovation of Teatro Colon, one of the world's great opera houses.

## An Introductory Itinerary

Buenos Aires is too large to conquer in one visit, but first-time travelers can get a good introduction over the course of a



Highly ornated doorway on the Calle Florida pedestrian street in downtown Buenos Aires displays some of the wide variety of the city's architecture.

few days or a week. A five-line metro system, 144 bus routes, and ever-present black and yellow taxis make getting around the city easy.

No matter where one goes in Buenos Aires, architecture dominates. From the Italianate portico of the presidential palace of Casa Rosado (Pink House) in Plaza de Mayo to the super modern high rises side-by-side to refurbished warehouses that house cafes and cultural centers in the old port area of Puerto Madero, the city provides a visual feast.

Barry Goldsmith, professor of architecture at New York University, says, "Whatever the style of architecture – be it Spanish colonial, neo-classical, neo-baroque, neo-gothic, French, Italian, English, art deco, or art nouveau – Buenos Aires has it, and frequently all of the above styles in a single building. No where else will you find anything like this."

The downtown business district, known as Microcentro, provides a central base for exploring the city. While

many excellent hotels abound, the Park Tower Hotel, part of Starwoods' Luxury Collection near Plaza San Martin, offers outstanding amenities, having won the 2007 and 2008 Travel & Leisure Award for best hotel in Latin America. Calle Florida, the city's famed pedestrian shopping street, is a five-minute walk away, and provides a good introduction to the constantly busy street life.

**Avenida 9 de Julio.** Named to honor the country's independence from Spain in 1816, this is the widest avenue in any city in the world – at 130 meters – and essentially divides the city. On it are the Teatro Colon and the Obelisk at Plaza de la Republica, built in 1936 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the founding of Buenos Aires.

**Palermo Soho.** Appropriately named after its New York counterpart, this recently gentrified area offers numerous off-beat stores and cafes and is a great locale for walking, shopping, and people watching. Although always active, it really comes alive around 11 p.m., Wednesday through Saturday.

**La Recoleta Cemetery.** Located in the exclusive Recoleta neighborhood, this museum cemetery is reminiscent of Père Lachaise in Paris. Mirroring the country's history, it is the final resting place of some of Argentina's most historical figures. Buried in vaults of widely varying architectural styles are ex presidents, heavyweight boxer Luis Firpo, artists, scientists, Nobel Prize winners, and Eva Peron, who only relatively recently was allowed to be buried in her father's family tomb – some 50 years after she died.

**San Telmo.** Plaza Dorrego in the heart of this old Buenos Aires neighborhood is host to outdoor cafes and, on Sundays, the bustling San Telmo Antiques Fair which features hundreds of vendors and people doing the Tango in the street. For a more formal presentation of Argentina's national dance,

head to La Ventana nearby. In addition to a tantalizing Tango performance, this brick-lined, dinner-theatre restaurant offers a memorable evening of folk music and an electrifying performance of the gaucho's skills with the boleadoras, weighted cords used to round up cattle.

**La Boca.** Sometimes called the Little Italy of Buenos Aires, this picturesque neighborhood of brightly colored buildings is full of restaurants and galleries, particularly on El Caminito, its main street. While sipping your afternoon cortado (espresso coffee with warm milk) at a sidewalk cafe you'll likely be entertained by a couple dancing the Tango.

**Malba Museum and Evita Museum.** Buenos Aires has a rich variety of museums, but these two, small in scale, are especially worth a visit. The former displays the works of 20th century Argentine and South American artists; the latter tells the life story of Eva Peron. Arguably one of the most politically important persons in Argentine history, though she was not a politician, Peron still remains controversial.

**Tigre.** This unique, jungle-like web of tributaries and islands along the Paraná Delta, a short train ride from downtown Buenos Aires, is a popular getaway for locals – as a day trip or vacation spot. Be sure to take the 90-minute boat trip along the waterways and follow it up with an asado grill luncheon at the Lo de Negri restaurant.

**Getting There**

American Airlines has two flights a day from Miami to Buenos Aires' Ezeiza Airport and now offers flat-bed service in business class. In addition to daily flights from Dallas, the airline last fall increased the New York–Buenos Aires run from once a day to 12 times a week. This will continue through April after which American will decide whether to keep or modify the schedule.

**Argentina Tourism Office,**  
[www.argentina.travel](http://www.argentina.travel)



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# Rio de Janeiro's ToursBrasil Greet Hard Times by Going High Upscale

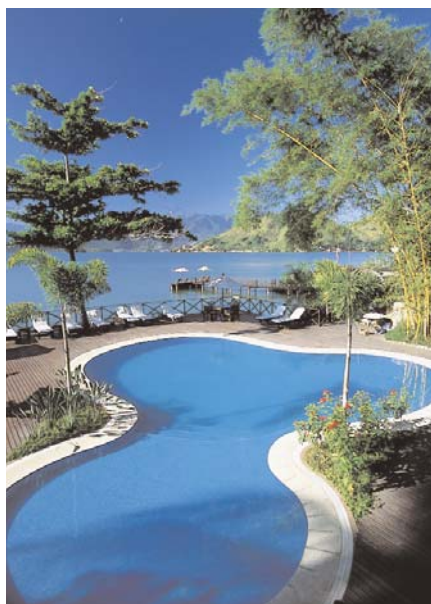
MARK ZUSSMAN

Every business in the travel industry is going to have to come up with its own way of staying afloat during the deepening world financial crisis and, in relation to the important North American market, the Rio de Janeiro-based destination management company ToursBrasil has decided to go with the formula of quality over quantity.

No need to translate the terms really, since everyone knows what they mean. The strapped middle class is simply going to have to be put on hold over the short term. People who are struggling to keep up home payments, car payments, credit card payments and kids' tuition just aren't going to be coming to Brazil this year, forget the siren song of one of the world's most gorgeous tropical coastlines, the lure of the Amazon rain forest, the richness of the cultural life. Wave pictures of Rio beaches in front of people who are worrying at night about whether their jobs are even going to be there in the morning and you make the hurt even worse. Instead, go after that much smaller population that has still, for whatever reason, escaped the rampant carnage and offer them something really exclusive and special.

ToursBrasil has a list of about a dozen pampering, high-end hideaways for this purpose — resorts and small hotels — most of them right at water's edge at various strategic points along the approximately 5,000 miles of Brazilian coast. One is the Tivoli Eco Resort in the lovely little beach town of Praia do Forte just a short distance north of the international airport in Salvador. Take it easy on the sand and in the water or drive into town for a taste of the exoticism that has made some people call Salvador the black Rome.

Another option, the Txai Resort, in a somewhat remote area of coconut



The Pestana resort at Angra dos Reis.

groves and old cacao plantations, on the state of Bahia's southern coast, offers spa treatments of various kinds as well as all the usual ocean and swimming pool diversions, horseback riding, rafting, mountain biking, visits to the nearby town of Itacaré and other gentle excursions.

## Angra, Búzios, Floripa

Many clients of course would just as soon take their leisure at a shorter distance from the great southern cities of São Paulo and Rio, and for these folks ToursBrasil proposes the Pestana Beach Bungalows on a glorious bay of several hundred islands at Angra dos Reis, a couple of hours' drive away from Rio to the west, or the even more intimate Trópico de Capricórnio with its panoramic views of many a nearby beach on the Búzios peninsula, a couple of hours' drive away from Rio to the east.

"It's a rare North American who knows the three southern Brazilian states of Rio Grande do Sul, Paraná and Santa Catarina at all," says ToursBrasil

founder and president Abraham Peczenik. "But there's an excellent reason to correct that deficiency, and that's the Costão do Santinho Resort and Spa on Santinho Beach at the edge of SC's island capital of Florianópolis. The facilities are beautiful. The island has 42 beaches." But consult ToursBrasil for the full list of featured properties and to help find the right one for any particular traveler.

In addition to working traditional markets in North American and Western Europe, Mr. Peczenik has been imaginative in recent years in also developing emerging markets in Russia, in the former SSRs and in Eastern Europe. On behalf of his Russian clients, many of them not just absurdly wealthy but liking to travel in extended family groups and to pass a month or so not in a hotel but in a large rented beachside house, he has developed a sizable inventory of such properties at numerous points along the Brazilian coastline — and also of small luxury inns that the Russians can take over lock, stock and barrel. This is not the way most North Americans prefer to travel necessarily, but for any who might like to give the approach a shot, the product is now available.

Mr. Peczenik has been toying with a new slogan for his company as well. He doesn't have it in final form yet, but translated from Portuguese into English, it goes kind of like this: Don't just put more years into your life, put more life into your years. The life in this last phrase doesn't need any more translating than the word "quality" does. But for anyone in doubt, life here means Brazil. Put more Brazil into your years.

**ToursBrasil,**  
[www.toursbrasil.com.br](http://www.toursbrasil.com.br),  
[toursbrasil@toursbrasil.com.br](mailto:toursbrasil@toursbrasil.com.br)

## U.S. CARRIERS FOCUSING ON COLOMBIA

JetBlue Airways recently inaugurated its first flight to South America with daily, nonstop service between Orlando, Florida and Bogota, Colombia, originating at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK).

The inaugural flight January 29 marked a trend in new, convenient air service to Colombia's top destinations.

Just prior, Delta Airlines began daily, nonstop flights between JFK and Bogota, Colombia. This follows on the heels of two new flights launched by Spirit Airlines from Fort Lauderdale, Florida to Cartagena and Bogota respectively in March and June 2008. Spirit has announced its strategy to further expand in Colombia in 2009 with new service to Medellin starting in March and plans to launch flights to Armenia and the Island of San Andres in the following months.

"Connecting the largest cities in the United States to Colombia is something we're very excited about," says Nubia Stella, Vice President Tourism Proexport Colombia. "In the past year, Colombia has experienced incredible growth from the U.S. with travelers eager to discover a wide array of refreshing and new experiences in one of Latin America's most unexplored regions. With the added flight service from the U.S., we expect this growth to continue steadily over the coming years."

In 2008, Colombia welcomed approximately 1,000,000 foreign tourist arrivals. Colombia's leading destinations include Cartagena de Indias, Bogota, Medellin and Cali.

Colombia Official Tourism Portal, [www.colombia.travel.com](http://www.colombia.travel.com);  
Proexport, [www.proexport.com](http://www.proexport.com)

## GLOBAL ENCOUNTERS WILL OFFER FREE USE OF NEW TRAVEL SYSTEM TO U.S. AGENCIES

Global Encounters, the Latin America travel holding company that operates CAT DMC and Class Adventure Travel, is in final stages of development, set to start sharing a new cutting-edge Latin America Travel System with all interested agencies.

Global Encounters has developed a system designed to integrate 21st-century technology with the boom in Latin American travel due to its recognizable proximity to the US and reduced overall cost.

Global Encounters will allow travel agencies around the world to quote with speed and ease as well as build thousands of customizable itineraries and, in the process, revolutionize agency-client interactions.

Companies interested in or already selling travel in Latin America should consider themselves prime candidates for this new system, which will allow agencies and its users to make real-time adjustments to itineraries.

The drag-and-drop feature changes any itinerary at the click of a button, so agents and clients can construct a tour and make adjustments to it instantly.

Global Encounters' signup page on the website links to a demonstration video and provides a short survey/series of questions that will show how the new system can easily streamline and improve operations for agents.

"This system has emerged from our DMC's logistical need for a tool that eases the work of organizing dynamic and customized travel requests for our clients and travelers. The system provides ease of access to information on excursions, hotels, and tour circuit possibilities for multiple countries through Latin America. My favorite feature rests in the state-of-the-art technology which allows sales people to customize any itinerary online with their passenger," says Marc Harrison, Global Encounter's Sales Director.

"Now that the Beta phase is over and we have tested it with some of our current clients, it's time to offer this free system to any company that looks to begin effectively selling destinations in Latin America, or that is dissatisfied with their current Latin America Provider," Harrison added.

The free Global Encounters Latin America Travel System will start seeking out users in March, applying results from the survey questions and Beta group, recognizing companies' specific concerns and requirements.

Global Encounters, [www.globalencounters.com](http://www.globalencounters.com)

The screenshot shows the GHIL Hotels website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Home, About Us, Services, and Contact Us. Below this is a large image of a hotel lobby. To the right of the image is the GHIL Hotels logo, which consists of the letters 'GHIL' in a stylized font inside a circle, with 'HOTELS' written below it. Below the logo is the text 'International Hotel Chain'. Underneath the logo is a list of services: 'GHIL has the key factors...'. The list includes: 'Market Viability and feasibility analysis', 'Architectural and Interior design drawing', 'Engineering specification and brand standards consultants', and 'Real estate project management and Promotion'. Below the list is a quote: 'GHIL Hotels' commitment to leadership in the Asian Region Hotel Industry'. At the bottom of the page, there is a section for 'Our member portfolio' which includes logos for Hilton, Four Seasons, and Marriott. Below this is a section for 'GHIL' with logos for various hotel brands. At the very bottom, there is contact information: 'Singapore 600 07-1 318 0000' and 'China 86 21 510 0000'.

### LAS ALCOBAS IS MEXICO CITY'S NEWEST SMALL LUXURY HOTEL



Las Alcobas, just opened last month, is a new hospitality venture in Mexico City's posh Polanco district. The intimate 35-room, seven-story property crafted by acclaimed interior design duo Yabu Pushelberg (whose client base includes Prada, Louis Vuitton, Four Seasons, W Hotels and Thompson Hotels) reflects the property's namesake—"the alcoves" in Spanish, expressing a modern sensibility infused with warmth and texture. Business and leisure travelers will delight in Las Alcobas' extreme attention to privacy and seclusion, its design-savvy furnishings and residential layout and its personalized amenities. All 35 guestrooms, including the two-bedroom suite and three penthouse suites featuring wraparound terraces. Room rates at Las Alcobas begin at \$415 for a standard room and range to \$2,500 for the penthouse suites.

Las Alcobas, [www.lasalcobas.com](http://www.lasalcobas.com)

### RIU EMERALD BAY OPENING SET FOR MAY IN MAZATLÁN, MEXICO

Riu Emerald Bay, the 15th Riu resort in Mexico, the 30th in the Americas and Caribbean region and first Riu resort in Mazatlán, will open its doors in May of this year. The all-inclusive beachfront resort offers 716 rooms, five restaurants, five bars, two swimming pools and three conference rooms.

Located on La Playa de Bruhas, Riu Emerald Bay's buffet dining room offers themed dinners three times a week offering dishes and

entertainment from select countries. Four a la carte restaurants include: "Tabasco" featuring Mexican cuisine, "Bamboo" with its Asian dishes and "Las Gaviotas," offering tastes from the traditional American steakhouse.

Riu Emerald Bay offers a gym, table tennis, beach volleyball, windsurfing, sailing, snorkeling and kayaking equipment. A free introductory scuba lesson is available in the large freeform pool. Kids have entertainment daily, a separate pool and kids club. Adults enjoy daytime and evening entertainment, live music and complimentary access and drinks at Pacha nightclub.

Available at additional charge are spa and salon services, billiards, motorized water sports, golf and horseback riding.

Each guestroom has an ocean view, balcony and is complete with a complimentary mini bar with full-size liquor bottles, satellite TV, laptop-size room safe, iron and ironing board.

Select rooms can interconnect and duplex double rooms with living rooms with sofa beds are available on the ground floor with an additional bedroom and bathroom on the second floor.

Triple rooms are also available. Junior Suites offer larger balconies and the bathrooms feature a hydromassage bathtub, shower and bidet. Junior Suites also have a lounge area with sofa and swiveling TV. Senior Suites offer all amenities of a Junior suite plus a dressing room and a Jacuzzi on the terrace.

RIU also has resorts opening this year in Guanacaste, Costa Rica; Tunisia; and Morocco.

RIU Hotels & Resorts, [www.Riu.com](http://www.Riu.com)

### INEXPENSIVE FAMILY GETAWAY DELIVERED BY CASAMAGNA MARRIOTT PUERTO VALLARTA

CasaMagna Marriott Puerto Vallarta is making wallet-friendly family fun with its new Escape! Family promotion.

The Escape! Family special has rates as low as \$200 per night with newly-renovated accommodations for two adults and two children 12 and under. Included in the special price are daily complimentary breakfast, pizza and movie night, and a milk-and-cookies nightly turndown service for the little ones. Kids four to 12 years old will also enjoy complimentary entry to the resort's Kid's Club, where tykes are invited to learn about Mexican culture with Spanish lessons, barro-clay pottery painting, bilingual folktales, Mexican cooking lessons and more.

Escape! Family is available for booking now through December 11, 2009, and requires a three-night minimum stay. For reservations when booking online, the promotional code is MAJ.

Situated between the Sierra Madre Mountains and Banderas Bay in Mexico, CasaMagna Marriott Puerto Vallarta Resort & Spa is one of the 100 World's Best Hotels according to *Condé Nast Traveler*.

CasaMagna Marriott Puerto Vallarta, 888-727-2347), [www.puertovallartamarriott.com](http://www.puertovallartamarriott.com)

## HACIENDA SAN ANGEL PLANS LANDMARK RENOVATION OF FORMER ELIZABETH TAYLOR RESIDENCE

From a glamorous and infamous past comes an elegant and subdued future for Casa Kimberly, one of Mexico's most famous celebrity landmarks. Once home to screen legend Elizabeth Taylor, the hilltop villa and its adjacent Burton House (which was connected to Casa Kimberly by an elevated 'love bridge') have been acquired by Janice Chatterton, owner-manager of Hacienda San Angel, the neighboring luxury boutique property renowned for its elegant Colonial Mexican design.

The renovation of the two villas, which Chatterton expects to complete by fall, 2010, will provide 12 fully remodeled, luxurious suites, a brand-new scenic restaurant, and a renovated pool area and fitness center within a combined, cohesive property to visitors seeking lavish, private accommodations in the outstanding destination of Puerto Vallarta.

Both Casa Kimberly and the Burton House were purchased by actor Richard Burton after he filmed *Night of the Iguana* in Puerto Vallarta in the 1960s. Post-renovation, the homes will boast a total of twelve guest suites, nine of which will offer guests private scenic terraces with spectacular views of Banderas Bay, and three of which are located adjacent to the property's tranquil pool area. Eight of the property's rooms will also possess private Jacuzzis. Casa Kimberly's exclusive "Elizabeth Taylor Suite," once the star's personal retreat, will be accessible via private elevator, making it suitable for privacy-seeking celebrities and VIPs visiting the area. All rooms will be fully-equipped with the same museum-quality artwork, rare antiques and amenities found at Hacienda San Angel.

Chatterton plans to add a new, open-air scenic restaurant, and will fully renovate all additional interior common areas, including courtyards (which will be re-landscaped and filled with artisan-crafted fountains and sculpture), the property's pool (which will be decorated with hand-painted Mexican tiles and sculpture) and the property's fitness center.

Hacienda San Angel, Janice@haciendasanangel.com,  
www.haciendasanangel.com

## 'FLY FREE' PACKAGES AT THE TIDES RIVIERA MAYA AND THE TIDES ZIHUATANEJO OFFER AIRFARE CREDITS WITH PREMIUM ACCOMMODATIONS

'Fly Free' Packages at The Tides Riviera Maya and The Tides Zihuatanejo Offer Airfare Credits with Premium Accommodations

If an unpredictable economy is making vacationing seem a touch extravagant, The Tides Riviera Maya and The Tides Zihuatanejo offer a couple of irresistible choices in Mexico with significant airfare reimbursements—\$500 to \$1,500 per person!

Credits are based on the cost of pre-purchased airline tickets and choice of accommodations—a villa at the Caribbean-reposed Tides Riviera Maya or a suite at The Tides Zihuatanejo on the Pacific.

The Tides Riviera Maya on Playa Xcalacoco is an eco-conscious hideaway of private villas along the Caribbean waterfront. Royal Villa, from \$785, has up to \$500 per person airfare credit; and Tides Villa, from \$1,600, up to \$1,500 per person airfare credit.

The Tides Zihuatanejo's thatched palapa cabanas dot six hundred feet of private beach—Playa la Ropa, with an infinity pool at bay's edge. Suites are within two-story, terracotta-tiled casitas, each with private terrace and intimate outdoor infinity pool, among tropical gardens and waterfalls, steps from the beach. The Lagoon Suite, from \$570, has up to \$500 per person airfare credit; Beach Suite, from \$780 up to \$700 per person airfare credit. Penthouse Suite rates are from \$970, up to \$800 per person airfare credit; and The Tides Suite's rates from \$1,150, with up to \$1,000 per person airfare credit.

There's a limit of two per room with a required four-night minimum. Guests must book by April 30 for stays through December 18, 2009. Pre-purchased airline tickets are presented at check-in, with the credit amount deducted from room folio at checkout. No cash value; blackout dates apply; subject to availability at time of request. Promotion does not apply to groups, and is not combinable with other offers.

The Tides Riviera Maya, 866-332-1672,  
www.tidesrivieramaya.com; The Tides Zihuatanejo,  
866-905-9560, www.tideszihuatanejo.com;  
www.thetidesresorts.com



Global Encounters

Buenos Aires Headquarters  
J.A. Cabrera 4423/29, C1414BGF  
Buenos Aires Argentina  
+54 11 4833 8400 T  
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### LOS SUEÑOS MARRIOTT OCEAN AND GOLFRESORT IS FOR COSTA RICA CONSERVATION



As part of a commitment to protect Costa Rica's natural resources, Los Sueños Marriott Ocean and Golf Resort the Resort has embarked on a project to reinsert the Scarlet Macaw into its natural habitat. Tonka Bean (*Dipteryx panamensis*) trees, used by the macaws for nesting and food source, are being acquired for the Central Pacific area, one of the places where the birds' presence has diminished.

Laura Miranda, Los Sueños Marriott's Marketing Manager, notes that "at this time there are nearly 450 Scarlet Macaws in the area and with the project we expect to increase their population. The goal of Los Sueños Marriott is to create a transitional center for these trees where they will be given adequate attention prior to planting them in the Central Pacific Area, where the Hotel is located," Miranda adds. Fifty Tonka Bean trees have been planted in green areas at Los Sueños Marriott and the golf course. The Hotel is attempting to determine the feasibility of developing a nursery where the species of trees can be reproduced.

Additionally, for over a year the Herradura School of Puntarenas, in conjunction with Los Sueños, has implemented an ecological beach campaign to pursue the Ecological Blue Flag Award—an award given to a beach with optimal ecological efforts and standards. Ms. Miranda states that the hotel uses sustainability environmental policies requested by the Sustainable Tourism Certificate (CST) program of the Costa Rican Tourism Institute (ICR) to reach their goals.

The Hotel recycles 80 percent of their waste. The majority of the vegetation in the gardens is native to the area, and guests are informed about which protected areas they can visit and their conservation policies. Miranda explained that the hotel established policies on water flow regulation, biodiversity protection, fixation of gases that produce the greenhouse effect, and maintenance of scenic beauty. The hotel also has extends efforts to protect the underground hydro resource that supplies the area's drinking water.

Marriott Hotels and Resorts of Costa Rica,  
laura.miranda@marriott-hotels.com,  
www.marriott.com/costarica; Los Suenos Marriott Ocean and Golf Resort, www.marriott.com/sjols

### NATUREAIR LAUNCHES ALTERNATIVE FUELING STATION

Every liter of household cooking oil flushed down the drain pollutes nearly one million liters of Costa Rican river waters. In an effort to keep these waters clean NatureAir, the world's first carbon neutral airline, has started Costa Rica's first alternative fueling station, through its own aviation fueling company, Aerotica. Since December, Aerotica has been providing bio-fuel in addition to its traditional sales of aviation gas and jet fuel. The alternative fuel is produced from a mixture of recycled vegetable and cooking oils, and can be run in any vehicle accustomed to diesel.

NatureAir is the first airline in Central America to run its entire ground operations equipment and fleet of diesel vehicles off this biodegradable fuel, estimated to reduce nearly 49,256 gallons of CO2 emissions a year.

Most of the recycled oil comes from NatureAir employees, each of whom were given their own canisters for collecting cooking oil in their homes to later bring the previously discarded oil to Aerotica where it is then converted to bio-diesel.

The fuel helps keep the country's waters free from pollution, significantly reduces smog production, and keeps vehicle motors cleaner.

Currently Aerotica is a private fueling station, but NatureAir is in talks with the government to be able to open Aerotica bio-fuel sales to other Costa Rican companies.

NatureAir, [www.natureair.com](http://www.natureair.com), [blog.natureair.com](http://blog.natureair.com)

### COSTA RICA'S LA MANSION INN WINS TRIPADVISOR TRAVELERS CHOICE AWARDS

The 25-guestroom boutique hotel in Manuel Antonio, Costa Rica, known as La Mansion Inn was chosen as a Best for Romance and Best Luxury Hotel by *TripAdvisor*® in its 2009 Travelers Choice® awards.

La Mansion Inn plans to unveil its new East Wing this month, officially adding four more Deluxe Rooms, two Honeymoon Suites, an Open Air Sky Lounge with 360-degree view and a Gym and Billiard Room to its inventory.

Located mountainside in picturesque Manuel Antonio in Central Pacific Costa Rica, the resort boasts magnificent views of the Pacific Ocean, Manuel Antonio Park and surrounding jungle. It's the ideal destination for adventure travelers and honeymooners, with its certified wedding coordinator and planner also making it a perfect venue for destination weddings. (La Mansion Inn, it should be noted, does not allow children under 12).

Resort low-season rates range from \$125 to \$850 plus taxes per night. In commemoration of Trip Advisor's 2009 Travelers Choice Award, La Mansion Inn is currently offering a special TripAdvisor four-night appreciation rate from \$700 that includes complimentary breakfast, lunch and non-alcoholic beverages; valid from April 15 until sold out.

La Mansion Inn, [rosalie@lamansioninn.com](mailto:rosalie@lamansioninn.com),  
[www.lamansioninn.com](http://www.lamansioninn.com); TripAdvisor, [www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com)

## K HOTELS ANNOUNCES OPENING OF COSTA RICAN HOTEL, THE BEACON ESCAZÚ

Los Angeles-based K Hotels has announced the grand opening in February of The Beacon Escazú, overlooking the mountains just outside of San Jose, Costa Rica. More than a luxury resort, The Beacon Escazú represents an ultimate escape to a haven of tranquility.

Featuring architecture with an exotic, vibrant Spanish aesthetic merged with old Colonial and modern design, The Beacon Escazú property includes a full-service restaurant and bar, wine cellar, and cigar room.

A relaxing on-site spa and the cozy luxury of 300 thread-count Italian sheets are just a few of the upscale comforts offered by the serene boutique hotel.

"This property is an ideal place for any traveler looking to explore Costa Rica and in need of complete relaxation. We are excited about having The Beacon Escazú as part of our boutique collection," said Lara Weiss, Managing Director of K Hotels.

The Beacon Escazú features The Muse Restaurant, fine international cuisine, prepared by world-renowned Chef Jean Pierre Peiny; business and fitness centers, spa facilities, outdoor pool, and luxury transportation. The hotel is located only six miles from San Jose.

For the first 90 days, a special opening rate of \$99 is being offered, after which rooms will be available from \$189 on weekends and \$229 on weekdays.

K Hotels, [www.k-hotels.com](http://www.k-hotels.com); The Beacon Escazú, [www.mybeaconescazu.com](http://www.mybeaconescazu.com)

## BLANCANEUX LODGE OFFERS RANGE OF TRAIL WALKS IN THE MAYA FOREST

Blancaneux Lodge is usually associated with Belize's Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve yet within a couple of miles of the lodge guests can enjoy the amazing ecological diversity of the 13,000 acres of jungle within the Noj Kaax Meen Elijio Panti National Park.

A range of new half-day and full-day walking tours have been developed for all ages and abilities. Expert guides lead guests to the lodge's own infra-red cameras that contribute data to Dr. Marcella Kelly's jaguar density research program.

The trails give easy access to the 100-plus orchid species found within a 10-mile radius of the lodge and the lodge's guides will identify and explain medicinal plants used by the ancient Maya. Howler Monkeys, tapir, ocelot, Keel-billed Toucan are just a few of the creatures that inhabit this remote and stunningly beautiful protected area.

Travelers may choose from dawn birding walks; jaguar tracking expeditions; treks to hilltop lookouts and secret waterfalls; or exciting night walks tracking the jungle's nocturnal creatures. Blancaneux Lodge guides are experts in exposing and explaining the wonderful secrets of the Maya Forest.

Blancaneux Lodge, [www.blancaneux.com](http://www.blancaneux.com)

## RIBBON-CUTTING AT HILTON GARDEN INN LIBERIA AIRPORT



Celebrating the opening last November of the first Hilton Garden Inn in Central America (as well as the fourth Hilton to open in Costa Rica in 2008) are (pictured, from left): Manny Gonzales, Director Hotel Performance Support, Hilton Garden Inn; Jacob Ascher, General Manager, Hilton Garden Inn Liberia Airport, Costa Rica; Don Ruben Pacheco, Sr. Owner, Enjoy Group; Carlos Ricardo Benavides, Minister of Tourism, Costa Rica; Andres Pacheco, Owner, Enjoy Group; and Uri Lipszyc, Owner, Solarium.

Hilton Garden Inn, [www.hiltongardeninn.hilton.com](http://www.hiltongardeninn.hilton.com)

## THE LODGE AT BIG FALLS SCHEDULES A 'LIVING MAYA PACKAGE'

Planned as a four-day/three-night trip to Toledo, Belize, March 28–31, The Lodge at Big Falls is including exciting surprises in its Maya package.

The Living Maya package takes visitors to the Maya Day events organized by the Tumul Kin Center of Learning in the Blue Creek village of the Toledo district.

The all-day Sunday program March 29 includes a rare chance to see the ancient Mayan ball game played. The ball game had ritual associations and the Popol Vuh, the Mayan religious narrative establishes its importance, which may have included human sacrifice.

There will also be a performance of the traditional Cortes dance that tells the story of the arrival of the conquistadores in Central America. The finale to the day will be a fireball game where players use sticks to strike a burning ball. Other activities throughout the celebrations include the finals of marimba and harp-playing competitions and poetry competitions. This colorful festival attended by hundreds of villagers from the district is being repeated after being successfully staged for the first time in 2008.

On the second full day, guests will visit the ancient Mayan site of Lubaantun where in 1926 the famous crystal skull was discovered by Frederick and Anna Mitchell-Hedges. After leaving Lubaantun they'll travel through Mayan villages with traditional palm thatched roofs to the Rio Blanco National Park.

The package includes accommodation, all meals, and tours and transfers, and is priced at \$699 ppdo plus tax; commissionable.

The Lodge at Big Falls, [rob@thelodgeatbigfalls.com](mailto:rob@thelodgeatbigfalls.com), [www.thelodgeatbigfalls.com](http://www.thelodgeatbigfalls.com), [www.birding-belize.com](http://www.birding-belize.com)