



Costa Rica's awesome Osa Peninsula



"Roughing it" in Lapa Rios

Green SEASON

Most travel bargains in Central America occur from May until the end of October when the region is hot but fresh thanks to daily sprinkles of rain. Although few Canadians travel south this time of year, it's actually an exquisite season; rainforests are lush and animal life is thriving.

If leaving as faint a footprint as possible is part of your travel mandate, a group of six eco-lodges in Costa Rica and Nicaragua is known for its sustainable, "earth saving" practices. These intimate locales include the 16-bungalow Lapa Rios Ecolodge with its 1,000 acres of protected rainforest on Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula. Elsewhere in the country, Latitude 10 Resort has a Girlfriend Getaway package, while other properties tout volcano zip lining, whitewater rafting and lazing in local hot springs. For the most part, offers include a free night's stay. Rates are typically 30 per cent less now than in high season. As well, kids can often stay and eat for free (cayugaonline.com).



BON VOYAGE!

If the cruise ship industry ever trademarked a slogan, it should be "bigger is better." Every year, these floating behemoths have more bells and whistles, and 2011 is no exception. Take the just-launched **Carnival Magic**, which has the first ropes course at sea, plus an 800-foot-long running track and a two-level, nine-hole miniature golf course. Costa Favolosa's Grand Prix driving simulator might appeal to the Villeneuve in you, while **Celebrity's Silhouette** boasts a quarter-hectare lawn kitted out with real grass — ready for everything from bocce ball to croquet. On the **Disney Dream**, live video is streamed to virtual portholes. Need more thrills? The AquaDuck water coaster ride extends 13 feet beyond the ship and soars 150 feet above the sea.

If bells and whistles don't grab you, how about the chance to rub elbows with 6,000-plus fellow passengers? **Royal Caribbean** has two ships that can accommodate your lust for larger. If smaller is more your style, **Seabourn's** latest, the 450-passenger **Quest**, incorporates a water sport marina that juts out from the stern so you can swim and kayak when the ship is anchored.

PHOTO CREDIT