

How We Roll:
Hot wheels, cool cars

Style: For this designer,
it's all about the fit

Road Food: A Texan puts
bbq on the map in Oslo

Spotlight: New music
from local talent

360 West

A FULL-CIRCLE VIEW OF WHERE WE LIVE

Open House

A less-is-more renovation
turns a '70s home into a
light-filled sanctuary

\$3.95 October 2014



Destinations



From a barrier reef and beaches to the biodiverse rain forest, this Central American country often gets overlooked in favor of Costa Rica. Look again — you might like what you see.



Close encounters with natural wonders in Pico Bonito National Park include those with berry-eating birds, artfully painted lizards and cool pools fed by waterfalls.

Jungle Land

Story and photos by Ralph Lauer



The Lodge at Pico Bonito offers the outdoors lover a chance to commune with nature in style.

I lie under fine linens inside my private bungalow, but the sounds of the jungle — chirps, hoots, howls, caws, whispers, screams — can be heard, allowing me to be part of the understory found outside the louvered shutters.

Instead of being unnerving, the sounds are calming: Such is the effect of the rain forest surrounding The Lodge at Pico Bonito, a former coffee and cacao plantation converted into an ecolodge situated in the jungle on Honduras' Caribbean side.

The place has 22 private cabins on its 400-acre grounds, along with a separate lodge and restaurant. The "lodge" description is apt, given the wood-beam-and-plank building style. Surrounded by native hardwoods and coffee trees, the cabins feel even more private. There are hammocks on each veranda, perfect for afternoon siestas, but each of the bungalows is air conditioned to cut through the thick humidity. A small pool and patio have been carved out of the jungle, with chairs, umbrellas and thatched-roofed bar area.

But it's nature that drew me to Pico Bonito, a chance to hike the rain forest and see colorful birds along with other wild creatures.

I have been warned that our morning hike will be



Hilly hikes are made even more arduous by the rainforest's humidity.



Live starfish are found in even the shallowest water.

strenuous, but since birding and swimming at the Incredible Falls are on the agenda, I figured it couldn't be too bad. I was wrong.

The humidity weighs on you, physically pressing you down. It drips from the mahogany trees over your head. It covers the leaves of the morning-glory vines and rhododendrons at your feet. Each breath is difficult, the crush of a heavy hand on the chest. The hike was touted as a four-hour round trip, and this was the intermediate option. In Colorado, the trail would be considered intermediate, but here in the rain forest, I wonder if it's doable in eight

hours and if we'll get back before dark. These bird watchers are hard-core.

Thankfully, the trail is well cut. We pass by coffee and cacao trees that are at the end of their production cycles. They are being replaced with native rain-forest hardwoods to return the acreage to its natural state. The 270,000-acre Pico Bonito National Park, which borders the resort, was formed by government decree in 1987, preventing any additional deforestation of the habitat for more than 400 species of birds and animals. Our guide, Joel Mejia, who



Guide Joel Mejia shows off a conch he picked up while snorkeling.



Jungle Land

During a daytrip, snorkelers enjoy a beach lunch at Cayo Cacahuate, one of the 15 remote islands and keys in Cayos Cochinos, about 10 miles from the shores of La Ceiba.

THE DETAILS

The Lodge at Pico Bonito

Located in the Honduran jungle, this rain-forest retreat deftly mixes ecotourism with luxury lodging. Explore the surrounding wilderness to see amazing flora and fauna, or check them out closer to the lodge via the landscaped grounds as well as the serpentarium and butterfly house, which are managed by resident naturalist James Adams. For reservations, 888-428-0221 or picobonito.com.

Getting there From Dallas/Fort Worth, fly to San Pedro Sula and take a three-hour comfortable van ride to Pico Bonito.

Rates From \$358 per night for a private cabin (private veranda with hammock, Wi-Fi) during peak season (January through April). Several standard cabins can connect to accommodate larger parties or families.



Guests at the lodge stay in rustic forest bungalows, thoughtfully equipped with hammocks and spacious decks.

speaks perfect English, points out the peculiar call of the blue-crowned motmot. He also helps us look through the thick undergrowth in order to spot spider monkeys in the huge Ceiba trees, named for a nearby city.

We return in time for lunch. The nearby grounds are landscaped to entice wildlife for more leisurely viewing. Eyes constantly wander from the table to the trees, which are filled with oropendolas, social flycatchers, tanagers, woodpeckers and hummingbirds. An agouti, a furry, brown, tailless animal about the size of a beaver, forages the grounds. Discussions stop midstream as someone in the group catches a flash of color or a shadowy shape

and everyone turns to attempt to identify the moving creature.

Our strenuous day helps work up an appetite, and lunch arrives on the veranda via the gracious staff at Pico Bonito. General manager Gabriel Cambon trained at the Strasbourg Hotel School in France and has been in Latin America for a number of years. His menu includes a few native dishes, seafood heavy on fresh local catches from the Caribbean and classic Continental cuisine. The Honduran-style ceviche is served in a cacao shell, and tacos of lightly battered fish are topped with a mildly spicy mayonnaise. At dinner, we enjoy the same mix of local, seafood and classic cuisine. A beautiful fan of incredibly thin tuna sashimi is meltingly tender, and the crepes Florentine are wrapped in delicate layers of phyllo. Roatán grilled lobster, served in the cracked shell, is topped with a basil-flavored

meuniere. My favorite is the coffee- and red-chile-crust tenderloin medallions, their spices lending an earthy flavor to a nice cut of Angus beef.

The locally grown coffee is a must at every meal. Made in a French press, it has a deep chocolaty flavor not found at the coffeehouses back home. Thick and smooth, it absorbs cream like the loamy soil soaks up rain. Don't worry about staying awake; the day's adventures, whether a rain-forest hike or white-water rafting, catch up with you soon enough. **360**



Locally grown and roasted coffee, served from a French press, is as rich and thick as drinking chocolate.