

EXPLORING  COSTA RICA

City Hostel Offers Great Location, Prices



By Matt Levin

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Costa Ricans Leila Mata and Daniel Vargas have traveled the world on standby.

Thanks to a friend at American Airlines, the two would regularly purchase unconfirmed



tickets to fly at a reduced rate to the great cities of Europe: Madrid, Barcelona, Prague, Florence, Milan, and Venice. They learned to live on a tight budget, eating just one or two meals a day and staying in hostels.

Along their travels, they accrued first-hand understanding of hostel life, both the good (a quaint little lodge in the Czech Republic that allowed them to bring their year-old child) and the bad (a guest house where they would wake up to the sounds of fighting between the husband-and-wife owners).

These experiences helped them decide on the kind of atmosphere they wanted to create for their own place: Hostel El Museo in downtown San José. Opened in May of this year, the hostel is a place where they themselves would love to stay. "We know what it's like to be in a disorganized and unclean place," Mata said. "And also to be in very nice places."

El Museo is set in a prime downtown location on a pedestrian boulevard across from the National Museum. It has eight rooms that can fit 40 people. While some areas of the hotel are still being renovated, the walls and floors are spotless, the bathrooms are clean and the friendly staff brings a pleasant vibe to the place.

Two inviting red hammocks hang outside the entrance of the hostel, speaking to the relaxed ambiance found inside. Although the rules are pretty lax—there's no curfew, for example—Mata says El Museo is not a party hostel. One employee joked that it's more of a place "to recover from a hangover, not start one."

While the house shows its age a bit on the outside, the interior is fresh and contemporary. The appealing common area has two large couches and a bright yellow beanbag chair. Just around the corner a kitchen is open to guests. Another common area is found on the lower level with similar



Hostel with a Heart: Leila Mata, co-owner of El Museo, aims to bring the best of European hostels to San José. Below, bright sitting and reception area. At left, the hotel facade facing the National Museum and dormitory rooms with bunk beds. **Photos by Francesco Vicenzi | Tico Times**

arrangements. Free WiFi runs throughout the house. A continental breakfast is included in the stay.

During her travels, Mata noted that most European hostels had the same prices, no matter what their quality. She pledged Hostel El Museo would also keep competitive prices to other local hostels, but set itself apart with a special emphasis on cleanliness and an easy-going atmosphere for guests. The hostel provides several room styles: dorms with bunk beds (\$13), shared doubles (\$30), private doubles (\$35), and private triples (\$45). A month long stay in a non-private room costs \$300.

The El Museo staff also sets up tours and works with tourism agencies to arrange trips to other parts of the country. And for those just arriving to Costa Rica, Hotel El Museo can send a private shuttle for pickup at the airport (\$20 for one person; \$10 per person for two or more people).

Mata and her husband hope their hospitality and the details in service will make it possible for people to have a great experience in San José, without breaking the bank.

"We mixed all the things we had experienced as travelers and are trying to give the best of those to our guests," Mata said. ■

Getting There, Rates, Info

Hostel El Museo is on the eastern side of San José just off 2nd Avenue and 50 meters south of the Museo Nacional. Rates vary from \$13-\$45 for private and non-private rooms. For more information call: 2221-7515 or email info@hostelmuseo.com. Visit the website at www.hostelmuseo.com.

San José Museums

The following museums are within walking distance of Hostel El Museo. A complete list of museums can be found in TT's *Exploring Costa Rica* Guidebook. Call (506) 2258-1558 or visit www.ticotimes.net to purchase a copy.

Contemporary Art & Design Museum (2257-9370, madc.ac.cr), CENAC, Av. 3/5, Ca. 15/17, 9:30 a.m.-4:45 p.m., Mon.-Sat. tourists \$3, residents ₡700, kids and seniors, free, students w/ID ₡500. Mondays free.

Gold Museum (2243-4202, museosdelbancocentral.org), below Plaza de la Cultura, Ca. 5, Av. Ctrl./2, 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Mon.-Sun. Over 1,000 pre-Columbian gold artifacts, temporary art exhibits. Residents \$4, tourists \$9, children under 11, free.

Jade Museum (2287-6034, ins-cr.com), outside INS building, Av. 7/9, Ca. 9/11, 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Mon.-Fri.; 9 a.m.-1 p.m., Sat. Pre-Columbian jade, stone, and ceramics. Residents ₡1,000, tourists \$8, kids under 12 and elders, free. Every Wednesday and first Saturdays of each month free entrance for residents and Costa Ricans.

Museo Filatélico Numismático de Costa Rica (2223-6918, correos.go.cr), Ca. 2, Av. 1/3, 2nd floor of Central Post Office, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Mon.-Fri., stamp collection, history of telegraph, mail. Adults ₡150, kids ₡100.

National Museum (2257-1433, museocostarica.go.cr), Ca.17, Av. Ctrl./2., 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Tues.-Sat., 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Sun. History of the nation housed in Bellavista Fortress built in 1870, pre-Columbian art (pottery, stone, gold). "Colonial Room" w/period art, furniture, charming natural history exhibits and a recently discovered tunnel running underneath the old fort. Temporary art, photo exhibits. Residents ₡1,500, tourists \$7, children under 12, free, students w/ID, \$4.

