

## Making a Difference: Harmony Hotel, Costa Rica

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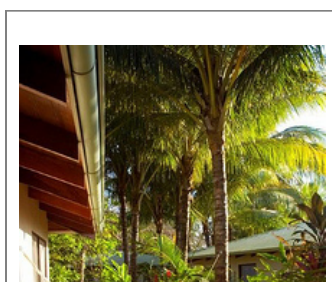
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Our **Making a Difference** award winner this month is **Harmony Hotel**, a high-end hotel in Costa Rica that has demonstrated a strong commitment to the environment and local community. The hotel, steps away from one of the best surf spots in the region, cultivates a vibe of relaxation and laid-back, low-key luxury. We spoke with Marisol Yglesias González, the "Experience, Learn, Connect, & Relax (ELCR)" Manager, about what a stay at Harmony Hotel is like, what specifically the hotel is doing to implement sustainability, and how they're getting their guests involved in sustainable practices.

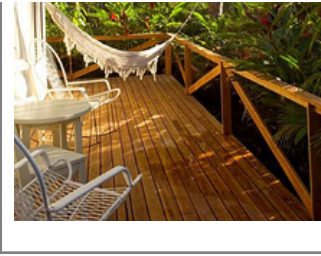
### Q. How would you describe the atmosphere at Harmony Hotel?

**González:** We offer complimentary yoga and surfing lessons that are quite popular and part of Harmony's relaxing experience. When we ask our guests what were the most special moments of their stay, they often refer to these lessons, along with the sunsets at the beach, food and drinks, our amenities (outdoor shower, hammocks, and chlorine-free pool), and the friendliness of our staff.



### Q. How can your guests connect to the environment and the community?

**G:** Visitors have the chance to see our sustainability initiatives first-hand through our "Green Living" tour. They can also participate in beach clean-ups organized by the hotel. After the clean-up, all the waste is collected and taken to the recycling center at the hotel, where it is weighed, registered, and



classified.

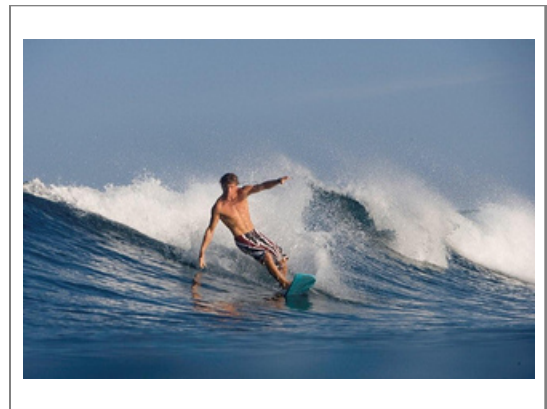
We want our guests to connect with our culture as well, so we invite them to join local activities such as soccer matches at the beach with our staff members or Nosara's civic festivals that celebrate Costa Rican folklore.

**Q. What kinds of wildlife can guests expect to see at your hotel?**

**G:** Our guests often see many different types of animals during their stay at Harmony Hotel, including coatis, howler monkeys, raccoons, iguanas, skunks, squirrels, armadillos, and several species of birds (parrots, hummingbirds, sparrows, and magpies). Furthermore, Guiones Beach is part of the Ostional Wildlife Refuge, which is one of the most important nesting sites in the world for olive ridley sea turtles. Lucky guests will have the chance to see a couple of these turtles at Guiones!

**Q. Why is sustainability so important for Harmony Hotel?**

**G:** Harmony Hotel is part of a hospitality chain that develops its operations and services under the philosophy of sustainability. We want to offer our guests a high-end experience that is supported by sound environmental practices. We believe that sustainability is not just a lifestyle - it's a concept that can be implemented across any industry, especially tourism. Costa Rica's economy depends greatly on the tourism industry. At Harmony, we firmly believe that we have a valuable ecological heritage to look after, and sustainable development is the right way to maintain our economy as well as our natural resources.



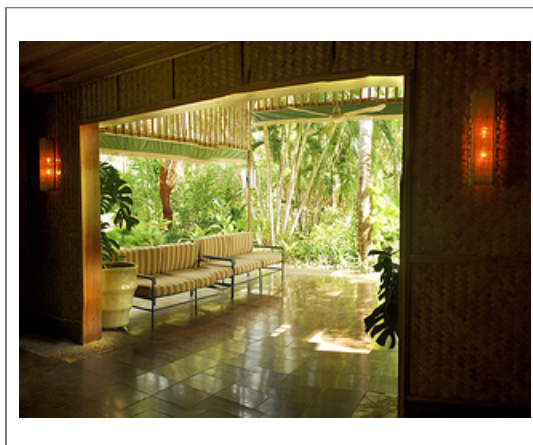
**Q. Can you talk a bit about what you're doing specifically to promote sustainability at Harmony Hotel?**

**G:** In addition to our beach clean-ups, we have a "Plant a Tree" carbon offset program, in which guests can sponsor a native tree species grown in our nursery and plant it in our garden. This can partially or entirely compensate for the carbon footprint of their flight to Costa Rica. We also recently participated in a study that determined our own carbon footprint, which included several recommendations for mitigation, and we're currently developing a mitigation plan for greenhouse gases.

Our initiative to protect howler monkeys addresses the positioning of Nosara electrical lines. Howler monkeys try to use power lines to access their habitat, which has been fragmented by the building of roads and the clearing of land for development. Our initiative aims to prevent electrocution of the monkeys by positioning the power lines outside of areas where they live.

We abide by "**The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism**," and our staff has been trained to face any circumstance related to the sexual exploitation of minors. We require all of our providers sign our "Code of Ethics for Providers," where we explicitly state our zero tolerance policy in regards to human exploitation of any form, especially the sexual

exploitation of children and adolescents.



Harmony also has a reforestation program in which thousands of trees are planted during an annual three-day campaign in alliance with the Costas Verdes Foundation. These efforts are combined with environmental education for both the staff at Harmony and for local community members in Nosara.

**Q. How are you supporting the local community?**

**G:** Harmony Hotel partners with two organizations to help our local schools: **Pack for a Purpose** and **Equilibrium**. We have developed environmental education campaigns at local schools that promote

sustainable practices and environmental awareness, covering topics such as conservation of flora and fauna, climate change, and organic waste management, among others. We contribute to improving the infrastructure of local schools and participate in local committees related to culture, art, and sustainability. We've also helped provide dental appointments for local children and have held lectures related to public health topics in order to promote health and avoid diseases.

At least 60% of our staff members live in surrounding communities. Harmony not only offers job opportunities, but also trains the staff. For instance, we provide scholarships for English classes to staff members who only speak Spanish, offer training in topics of interest to the staff, and have a corporate program that allows the staff to visit other hotels in the chain to get trained.

**Q. Of all of the hotels in the Nosara area, what makes Harmony Hotel special?**

**G.** Harmony Hotel offers our guests a unique and customized experience. Ideal for a total escape, Harmony is surrounded by vibrant gardens where guests mingle with hummingbirds and howler monkeys.

On the other hand, Harmony is ideal for a surfing adventure--we are the only hotel in the area that has direct access to Guiones beach, a pristine surf break with consistent, year-round waves. Harmony combines deep relaxation, low-key glamour, and sound environmental practices. When we ask our guests to describe their experience at Harmony in one word, most of them say: relaxing, peaceful, perfect, blissful, unforgettable, and, of course, harmonious.

