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THE TRAVELLING MAN

Home Alone

In Costa Rica's lush Peninsula Papagayo, **Bianca Teixeira** discovers the pleasures of ditching a hotel room in favour of her own private villa

DO YOU SEE THAT HOUSE at the edge of the cliff?" our captain asks, pointing up into the sky. He's been talking since we took to the water, and I'll admit to only half-paying attention. I caught this directive though, so I turned my head lazily into the sunlight to look. Hundreds of feet above the Pacific Ocean, through a dense canopy of trees, the winding balcony of a private home is just barely visible. "That's where Jay-Z and Beyoncé stay when they come to Costa Rica," he says. I am all ears.

We're just off the Peninsula Papa-

gayo, a 2,300-acre paradise brimming with a mixture of jungles (I'm told there are over 9,000 species of plants) and serene beaches of white, coral, gray, and black sands. We're not staying at the same villa as the The Family Carter do (despite my fervent-but-subtle suggestions), but our own accommodations at Exclusive Resorts are only a five-minute golf cart ride away. So, we're basically neighbours.

For the last few years, Exclusive Resorts has been creating experiences that aggressively defy travellers' expectations. For the price of a membership

(starting at \$85,000 USD) and annual dues (starting at \$1,250 USD), guests have access to one of the group's 400 villas around the world — whenever they want. It's a growing trend and a shift in the luxury market: like the Carters, vacationers in search of extravagance and privacy have decided to eschew upscale hotels in favour of private villas that remind them of home. Sitting in one such villa, I think back to Airbnbs I've had the misfortune of staying in, homes that didn't quite live up to their photos. The four-bedroom residence that will be mine for a

Photos: Getty Images / Stefano Politi Markovina, fotoVoyager, courtesy of Morro Fi.



week in the Peninsula Papagayo is every bit as awe-inspiring as it looked online. Nestled in the cliffs of the peninsula overlooking the coast, each villa enjoys the kind of seclusion that acres of wilderness afford you — albeit seclusion with a fully stocked bar, ridiculously thorough cleaning service, and an executive chef that makes house calls.

It was the perfect base from which to explore that above-mentioned Costa Rican jungle. When the boat finally docked, I found myself perched literally atop one of those 9,000 trees, staring down toucans and spider monkeys

while strapped to a (supremely terrifying) 400-foot zip line. Gliding through the trees and over a rushing river, I was overwhelmed by the natural beauty around me. This must be what Beyoncé feels like when she enters a stadium, also in a harness.

And the best part: a specially prepared four-course dinner was waiting for us when we returned to the villa. We didn't have to wade through buffets or even sit with other guests — unless you count the capuchin monkeys who swung by angling for a snack. Exclusivity, it turns out, has its perks.

Stay Different
Airbnb is fine — if you're into looking through other people's laundry. If you're looking for 5-star luxury but don't want to be cooped up in a hotel, try one of these sites instead

One Fine Stay
Available in London, Paris, Rome, LA, Miami, and New York, OneFineStay allows members to stay at specially screened and curated homes belonging to people who love to travel as much as you do.
ONEFINESTAY.COM

Time And Place
In addition to staying in some of the most gorgeous homes in the world, the concierge will let you know all the must-see attractions. They even boast about being able to secure you tickets to sold-out shows.
TIMEANDPLACE.COM

Villa Of Distinction
No matter the occasion, rest assured, Villas of Distinction has what you're looking for. Everything from one-bedroom apartments to 42-bedroom estates can be found across 50 destinations around the world
VILLASOFDISTINCTION.COM

Luxury Retreats
It's all in the name. This site will find you the most amazing, music-video-worthy villas around the world, each with their own 24/7 personal concierge service available for your every need. Even Richard Branson's Necker Island is available to rent for a cool \$60K a day.
LUXURYRETREATS.COM