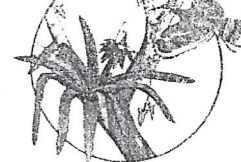


# Welcome to Selva Bananita Lodge



## GENERAL INFORMATION

The Lodge is located at the foot of Cerro Muchilla, or Muchilla Mountain, in the Province of Limón on the Atlantic side of Costa Rica.

Cerro Muchilla is part of an eastern outcropping of Costa Rica's southernmost mountain range, the Cordillera de Talamanca, much of which belongs to the enormous Costa Rican/Panamanian La Amistad Biosphere Reserve. This protected zone consists of a core - La Amistad International Park - and several surrounding wildlife and Indian reserves (which also act as wildlife reserves), adding up to a total of about one million hectares (two and a half million acres) of uninterrupted, protected land. This "green belt," which spans southern Costa Rica from east to west, remains the least explored territory in the country, its biological wealth scarcely studied.

*Selva Bananita Lodge* is built on our family farm, of which only one third is actually used for farming. Our father, Rudi Stein, who has farmed in Latin America since the 1950's, purchased the land for farming and wood exploitation in 1974. In the early years of his land tenure, he obtained a government permit to do selective logging on the forested portions of his land. This permit went mostly unused, and in 1994 our family decided to declare the untouched two thirds of the farm (850 hectares or 2,000 acres) a private, biological reserve and built the lodge as an alternative source of income. This was a moral, not an economic decision, since it is unlikely that the income from the lodge will ever approximate the commercial value of the protected wood.

The cabins stand on a ridge flanked by two streams. On one side of the ridge you will see the Bananita River and its valley, where the farm's pastures, plantations, and reforested areas are (great birdwatching here!). On the other side your eyes will fall upon the beautiful Cerro Muchilla and the Amistad Biosphere, which our borders touch.

We realize that our very existence in this environment affects it, but we try to minimize our impact in a variety of ways. Rather than building the cabins closer to, or in the forest, we purposefully erected them in an area that had already been altered by human activity. Eighty percent of the hardwood used to build the cabins was obtained from "second class" wood discarded by loggers from trees already cut for other purposes. As much as twenty percent of a tree is classified as "second class" and is normally left to waste. We wish to set an example for how to maximize the use of a tree once it is cut down, because using trees efficiently is one way to reduce deforestation.

Each cabin stands on stilts, in traditional Caribbean style. This type of architecture reduces moisture inside the buildings and improves the view and ventilation. Furthermore, far fewer insects and other critters find their way inside. Even so, you may want to inspect your shoes for unwanted guests before putting them on!

Many hotels and lodges in Costa Rica use the charming palm roofing inspired by traditional Indian architecture. The excessive use of *suíta* palm for roofing, however, has contributed to its endangerment. Furthermore, this type of roofing requires regular spraying with pesticides to keep insects out (whether hotel operators admit to it or not). We therefore opted for thick tar paper roofing or synthetic roofing instead.

Without the use of electricity we hope to create a quiet and relaxing environment for our guests and ourselves, very much in tune with the surroundings. If you need to recharge any batteries, however, we may be able to arrange it for you through the farm management.

The main office is located in the building opposite the entrance to the cabins. Here you may leave valuables for safekeeping.

If you follow the main road downhill, you will find our *rancho*, which has a dining area, bar, and small library upstairs, and kitchen and personnel facilities downstairs. Meals are served at the *rancho*. Please advise us of any dietary restrictions as soon as is convenient.

The farmed portions of the land have a history worth telling: they were originally leased from the government in the 1920's by employees of a U.S.A.-based banana company. They harvested the primary forest along portions of the Bananita River valley while the company established mid-scale banana plantations in the nearby coastal region. A combination of factors, including a big recession in 1929, massive floods, and banana diseases, drove the company out in the 1920's and the land was left to fallow.

When our father purchased the land in 1974, the former banana fields had reverted to secondary forest. He cleared the brush from this secondary growth and established a sustainable, integrated crop system combining plantain, cocoa, and dwarf coconut, all interspersed with the native tree known locally as *laurel* (*Cordia alliodora*). At first this system worked well because the plantains produced good crops. After the third year, however, the plantain succumbed to a serious fungal disease (*sigatoca*) and was eliminated. By the time the cocoa plants reached maturity, it became clear that the hybrid which Rudi Stein's bank had required him to plant as part of the loan contract, was of far inferior quality than traditional, local varieties. In the meantime, the dwarf coconuts developed a serious root disease that felled the majority of the plants, and the remainder were not worth harvesting because of poor market prices.

After many years of trying out other farming alternatives, the farm is today home to organic banana plantations and a cattle breeding program intended to produce dual-purpose breeds, i.e., cattle as useful for milk production as for beef production. You will have a chance to learn more about the farm on our guided tour.

*At Selva Bananita Lodge and Reserve we offer tranquility, beauty, close contact with nature, and the opportunity to experience the rain forest first hand. We also offer insights into agriculture in the humid tropics. Many tourist resorts in Costa Rica bring visitors in touch with the exquisite natural beauty of the country, but we are among the very few who have also taken an active stand in environmental protection. We keep the number of visitors that enter the Reserve within strict limits at any given time, and we established Fundación Cuencas de Limón, a nonprofit foundation which has become a regional leader in watershed protection and educational programs. The Foundation obtains its funding from private contributions and from income generated by Selva Bananita Lodge. By choosing to come here you have become an integral part of the conservation process, and we thank you for it.*

If interested, you may obtain a copy of this document from the managers

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