



Online Edition

**THE TICO TIMES**

Central America's Leading English-Language Newspaper

---

**Nauyaca Falls: A Ride to Remember Near Playa Dominical**

*Kate Galante - February 15 2008*

The brochure for don Lulo's tour of Nauyaca Falls offers all the pleasures of a tropical dream tour. Much to our delight and surprise, it turned out to be just that and more. Imagine winding through the jungle on horseback, eating delectable native food under a thatched hut, mingling with macaws and toucans and plunging into a crystalline pool below a breathtaking waterfall. It is real. It is available. And the price is still right.

The yet unspoiled Barú River winds its way down through the Talamanca Mountains south of San José and drains into the Pacific Ocean at Dominical, on the southern Pacific coast. Along the way, it engenders various dramatic waterfalls, many of which are accessible only by hiking or on horseback. Perhaps the finest of these is Nauyaca Falls, in the mountains northeast of Dominical. The falls are formed by two sharp rock drops, one of 150 feet and one of 65 feet, into a deep, inviting pool with 3,000 feet of surface area.

We mounted up at 8 a.m. to begin our tour. Not everyone in the group knew how to ride a horse. In fact, we had two small children in tow, but this was not a problem. The guides questioned each of us about our experience and not only provided the right horse for everyone, but also encouraged us to have a relationship with our horses by teaching us their names. As it turned out, we would later realize that trusting our horses was crucial.

Once on our way, we rode through a luxuriant jungle and across a couple of small, rocky rivers. The paths were wide and easy to ride. Every step of the way, the guides were there to assist the inexperienced riders and to encourage the experienced ones to do as they pleased, within limits, of course. "Hey," we thought, "this is easy!"

Around 9 a.m., we arrived for breakfast at La Casa de Don Lulo. Here, we found nestled in the jungle a kitchen and a couple of picturesque thatched structures containing some long tables. The food is served family style, and it's all you can eat. The waitresses came out with platters piled high with corn cakes, tropical fruit, a selection of bread and other goodies, and carrying jugs of orange juice and fresh Costa Rican coffee. It was all *muy rico*, that is to say, yummy.

Here, also, we explored the mini zoo behind the dining halls. The door of the cage of the brilliant-colored macaws was open so that the birds could come and go as they pleased. We also found a tame toucan, so sweet he sat on several visitors' arms and

picked crackers out of their mouths, and a pack of *tepezcuintles* (pacas, a kind of large rodent) running around under our feet.

Getting the children, not to mention a few of the adults, away from all this was not easy, but we managed to get under way again about 10 a.m. That's when the real adventure began. As we got closer to the river and the falls, the trail got narrower and steeper. Finally, we turned off the main trail onto a rocky path that shot straight down the mountain.

The horses were nearly up to their knees in mud, and underneath this mud were huge boulders. The wonderful thing about a horse, however, is that it doesn't want to fall down either, and these horses, of course, really know what they're doing. It was then that we learned how important it was to have a relationship with our animals and, above all, to trust them.

Everyone arrived safe and sound, with the 5-year-old screaming because he had wanted to be first. We tied up our horses in an area at the bottom of the trail and made our way down a narrow path to the falls.

It was well worth all the trouble. There they were, like something out of a Disney movie: tropical sunshine, pristine waters, an enormous double falls. The pool we all plunged into was cool, refreshing and plenty big enough to swim around in, or, at least, to swim around the edges, for the current from the falls is so strong that it pushes all but the strongest swimmer back toward shore.

To our surprise, the guides plunged in and started rigging up ropes. First, they installed a rope that ran from the shore to the bottom of the falls and started dragging swimmers to the falls. Next, they installed a series of ropes that allowed people to climb up through the falls to a high ledge where, to get back down, they had to plunge into the deep pool below. Some of us were more adventurous than others.

After a couple of hours of this, everyone had developed a raging hunger. Back on the horses it was, this time to climb, now with total confidence, up the same steep, muddy trail and on to don Lulo's.

Lunch was even better than breakfast – some extraordinary chicken, potatoes, rice, beans and lots of other delights. Then, alas, it was time to go home.

We got back to the highway at 2:30 in the afternoon after a six-and-a-half-hour tour that left us with memories to last a lifetime.

### **Getting There, Rates, Info**

Head south from San José on the Inter-American Highway to San Isidro de El General and turn off on Highway 243, which goes to Dominical. Proceed 23.5 kilometers to Platanillo and then another 2.5 kilometers to the Nauyaca Falls office.

The entire tour, which includes horse and guides, two meals and entrance to the

park, is only \$45 per person. With the exception of a few holidays, it's open year-round, every day except Sunday. There is one hotel close by, the Villas Paraíso Tropical (787-8016, [info@villasparaisotropical.com](mailto:info@villasparaisotropical.com), [www.villasparaisotropical.com](http://www.villasparaisotropical.com)). You can rent a small villa there for several people for about \$100 a night. This includes a kitchen, a pool and a nice restaurant. Otherwise, you need to find a hotel in Dominical, which is another 10 km down the road.

For information or to arrange a tour, call 787- 8013, e-mail [nfo@cataratasnauyaca.com](mailto:nfo@cataratasnauyaca.com) or, visit [www.cataratasnauyaca.com](http://www.cataratasnauyaca.com).

---

The Tico Times is Central America's Leading English-Language Newspaper, covering news, business, tourism and cultural developments in Costa Rica and Central America. The award-winning weekly has been reporting on the region from San Jose, Costa Rica, since 1971 and became a member of the Inter-American Press Association in 1989. TT's Online Edition provides a brief capsule of stories appearing every Friday in our PRINT EDITION. And in response to reader demands, we now offer a complete DATABASE of back issues and online CLASSIFIEDS.

Call us at 258-1558 inside Costa Rica or from the U.S. 011 (506) 258-1558 or fax us at 233-6378 inside Costa Rica or from the U.S. 011 (506) 233-6378, email: [info@ticotimes.net](mailto:info@ticotimes.net)