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COSTA RICA

Local hostel and restaurant co-owner **Shannon Smith** moved from Austin, Texas, to Costa Rica's mountainous Monteverde region after falling in love with it in 2002. "I was travelling in the area and just never left," she says. When she's not serving up the best tacos around at Taco Taco Taqueria, she's at one of her favourite mountain spots.

SOUVENIR SHOPPING

"There's a souvenir shop on every corner here. To find more creative things, stop at Luna Azul, which has lots of cool knick-knacks and clothing, and it's all locally made."



MONTEVERDE MUST-DO

"You have to experience the Cloud Forest. It doesn't matter which reserve you choose, they're all non-profit. Do a nice, long hike—it's phenomenally beautiful. The gem of the cloud forest is the hiking."



BEST LOCAL DINING

"Hotel Belmar has a great farm-to-table dining experience that's all organic. Its restaurant, Celajes, creates foods with local flavours like coffee and chocolate. It has a beautiful mixed-greens salad in a toasted Parmesan bowl, filled with edible flowers. Another [dish] I love is the steak with an organic coffee glaze."



BEST VIEW

"The road down toward San Luis has a mirador, a lookout point that is spectacular. You can hike to it or get there by car."



TRIP-PLANNING TIP

"Most people can find something mind-blowing in Monteverde in just two or three days, but you'll miss [out] if you're only here for a day. Most visitors I meet regret not having an extra day or two here." —Anna Daugherty



FAVOURITE DAY TRIP

"There are a few hot springs in the area that aren't as touristy as the La Fortuna springs. One great spot is about a 20-minute drive outside the village in an area called La Lindora. There are two pools overlooking the river. There is a horse trail you can take, or you can hike to them."



LOCAL EVENTS

"If you ever hear about a local event, tourists are welcome. Everyone here wants to show off what we do. The community is incredibly accepting, and there's always something happening—especially during high season. The supermarket and Pension Santa Elena have flyers of what's going on."



GETTING THERE

WestJet flies to Liberia seven times a week from Toronto and Calgary, and to San Jose three times a week from Toronto.