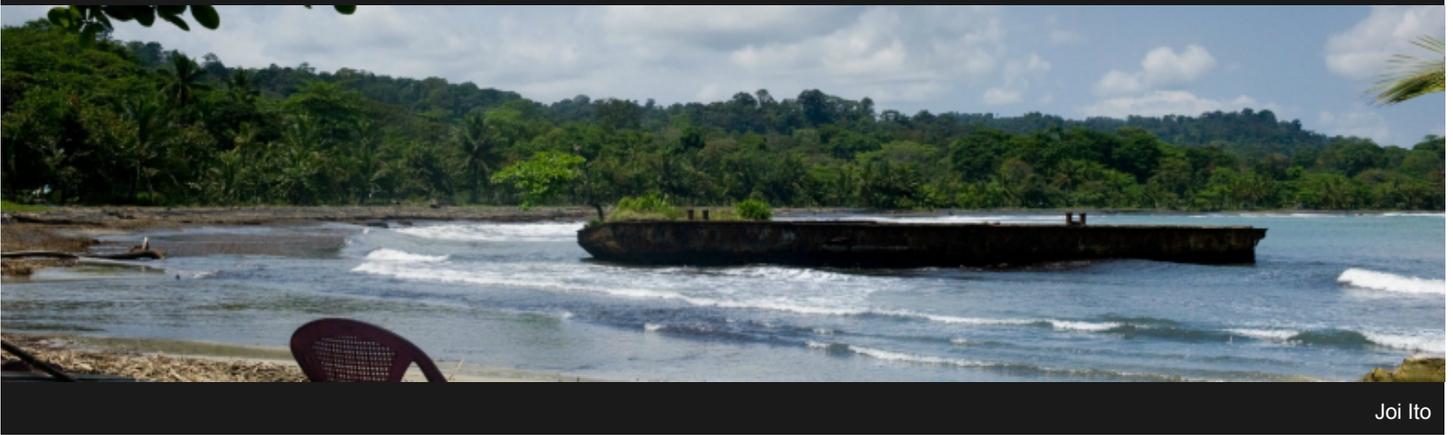




**nileGUIDE**

ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



Joi Ito

# Sleep Well in Puerto Viejo

## **Puerto Viejo, 5 Days**

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# Guide Description



**AUTHOR NOTE:** The Caribbean has many choices for sleeping, but sometimes the best places to lay your head are harder to find. These 5 places, starting with Casa Verde Inn in Puerto Viejo center and ending with the Treehouse Lodge in Punta Uva, are for those who like to change it up and sleep their way from town to out of town;))

# Itinerary Overview

things to do  
restaurants  
hotels  
nightlife

## Day 1 - Puerto Viejo



**Casa Verde Lodge**



**Tree House Lodge**

## Day 2 - Puerto Viejo

**DAY NOTE:** Check-in to one of Caribblue's free-standing bungalows and dip in the inviting pool, just south of Puerto Viejo's center.



**Caribblue Bungalows**

## Day 3 - Puerto Viejo

**DAY NOTE:** A little further south down the road, Aguas Claras has adorable little cottages so you can imagine living la pura vida all year long. Miss Holly's Kitchen is here, too.



**Aguas Claras**

## Day 4 - Puerto Viejo

**DAY NOTE:** Polynesian style bungalows in a lush setting in Playa Chiquita, a romantic restaurant is on the premises, too.



**Shawandha Lodge**

## Day 5 - Puerto Viejo

**DAY NOTE:** Remember that you are in the jungle, sleep in your own tree house in Punta Uva's Treehouse Lodge. Yoga classes are offered here, too.

# Day 1 - Puerto Viejo

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**contact:**

tel: 2750-0015

fax: 2750-0047

[www.cabinascasaverde.com](http://www.cabinascasaverde.com)

**location:**

Puerto Viejo Limon 7304

## Casa Verde Lodge

**DESCRIPTION:** This is my favorite hotel right in Puerto Viejo town, regardless of the price. A quiet sense of tropical tranquillity pervades this place. The rooms are spread around a small but growing complex. Most are large, with high ceilings, tile floors, private bathrooms, and a private veranda. The rooms with shared bathrooms are housed in a raised building with a wide, covered breezeway between the rooms. The front and back porches of this building are hung with hammocks and surrounded by lush gardens, where you'll find the showers and toilets. There are also two fully equipped apartments available in a neighboring duplex. Everything is very well maintained, and even the shared bathrooms are kept immaculate. The hotel also features a small but well-stocked gift shop, a poison-dart-frog garden, a good-size outdoor pool with a waterfall, and a separate outdoor massage hut. Even though it's an in-town choice, there's great bird-watching all around the grounds. © Frommer's

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# Day 2 - Puerto Viejo

**DAY NOTE:** Check-in to one of Caribblue's free-standing bungalows and dip in the inviting pool, just south of Puerto Viejo's center.

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**contact:**

tel: 2750-0035

fax: 2750-0057

[www.caribblue.com](http://www.caribblue.com)

**location:**

Puerto Viejo Limon 7304

## Caribblue Bungalows

**DESCRIPTION:** This boutique resort is a wonderful choice in this neck of the woods. The rooms are spread around the well-tended and lush grounds. My favorites are the raised-stilt wood bungalows, with spacious bedrooms featuring either one king-size bed and one single bed or two queen-size beds. The beds are covered with mosquito nets, and there's a small veranda with a hammock. The nicest features here are the bathrooms, with their intricate mosaic tile designs. Deluxe bungalows come with televisions and air-conditioning. The standard rooms are in a couple of concrete-block buildings with high-pitched thatch roofs. They are also spacious and comfortable, but not quite as private or charming as the bungalows. Another option is a two-bedroom house with a full kitchen, for families or for longer stays. A very inviting free-form swimming pool has a swim-up bar, and the restaurant here tends to serve excellent Italian and local cuisine. Caribblue is located about 90m (295 ft.) or so inland from the southern end of Playa Cocles. © Frommer's

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# Day 3 - Puerto Viejo

**DAY NOTE:** A little further south down the road, Aguas Claras has adorable little cottages so you can imagine living la pura vida all year long. Miss Holly's Kitchen is here, too.

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**contact:**

tel: 2750-0131

fax: 2750-0368

[www.aguasclaras-cr.com](http://www.aguasclaras-cr.com)

**location:**

Puerto Viejo Limon

## Aguas Claras

**DESCRIPTION:** These brightly painted individual bungalows are built on raised stilts and feature fancy gingerbread trim. They are all of wood construction, and all come with private verandas and fully equipped kitchens -- although some have just a two-burner cook-top, while others come with a full stove and oven. Inside, they are bright and airy, with either wood or tile floors. There are two 1-bedroom cottages, two 2-bedroom affairs, and one 3-bedroom house. The compound is just a few steps away from a lovely section of Playa Chiquita, and the restaurant here, Miss Holly's Kitchen, is excellent. Maid service is provided every other day. If you book 5 nights, the sixth night is free. © Frommer's

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# Day 4 - Puerto Viejo

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QUICK NOTE

**DAY NOTE:** Polynesian style bungalows in a lush setting in Playa Chiquita, a romantic restaurant is on the premises, too.

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**contact:**

tel: 2750-0018

fax: 2750-0037

[www.shawandhalodge.com](http://www.shawandhalodge.com)

**location:**

Puerto Viejo Limon 7304

1 **Shawandha Lodge**

**DESCRIPTION:** Isolated and romantic, the individual bungalows here are rustically luxurious. Creative flourishes abound. The thatch-roofed, raised bungalows feature high-pitched ceilings, varnished wood floors, and either one king-size bed or a mix of queen-size and single beds. The bathrooms are practically works of art, each with original, intricate mosaics of hand-cut tile highlighting a large, open shower. Every bungalow has its own spacious balcony, with both a hammock and a couch, where you can lie and look out on the lush, flowering gardens. The beach is easily accessed by a private path, and a host of activities and tours can be arranged. There's a large open-air restaurant and lounge where meals and drinks are served. The menu is an eclectic mix, featuring fresh fish and meats in a variety of French, Caribbean, and Polynesian sauces. © Frommer's

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# Day 5 - Puerto Viejo

**DAY NOTE:** Remember that you are in the jungle, sleep in your own tree house in Punta Uva's Treehouse Lodge. Yoga classes are offered here, too.

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**contact:**

tel: 2750-0706

[www.costaricatreehouse.com](http://www.costaricatreehouse.com)

**location:**

Puerto Viejo Limon

## Tree House Lodge

**DESCRIPTION:** The four individual houses here are the most unique and stylish options on this coast. All are distinct and quite large, with fluid and fanciful architectural details and tons of brightly varnished woodwork. As the name implies, the Tree House is built into and around a large sangrillo tree. The Beach House is closest to the sea and actually features an ocean view from its kitchen and broad deck. However, the crowning achievement is the three-bedroom, two-bathroom Beach House Suite, with its spectacular domed bathroom, which during the day is lit by sunlight streaming through scores of colored glass skylights. All of the houses are beautiful, and you'll spend much of your time here marveling at the creative touches and one-off furniture. This property is set right off Punta Uva, one of the nicest swimming beaches on this coast. © Frommer's

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# Puerto Viejo Snapshot

## Local Info

Puerto Viejo de Limon is named after the old harbor at its center, a tiny seaside village nestled along the road 4 hours east of San Jose on Costa Rica's Caribbean Coast. Enclosed by dense rainforest and lush primary jungle that comes down steeply to meet the sea, Puerto Viejo lies in the Talamanca region, an area defined by dramatic, contrasting landscapes over a wide variety of terrain. 1.5 hours south of Limon, and thirty minutes from the neighboring town of Cahuita, Puerto Viejo's population is a mix of the original inhabitants of the Cabecar, Bri-Bri and Kekoldi tribes, Jamaicans, and Europeans, and making Puerto Viejo an international enclave. There are no high-rise hotels, golf courses, or fast food franchises in Puerto Viejo, these are roads less traveled, unpaved paths leading into virgin jungle...reflecting the community's commitment to conservation and modest development that encourages eco-conscious tourism. The beaches south of town are pristine stretches of and soft white sand, fringed with coconut palms and perfect for strolling and sunbathing. Miles of active coral reef are excellent for snorkeling and diving. With weather that is warm and green all year long, Puerto Viejo is an ideal place for escape-from-it-all retreats and unforgettable vacations.

Bordered by two national parks, Manzanillo-Gandoca National Wildlife Refuge to the south, and Cahuita National Park to the north, Puerto Viejo hums with sounds and sights of nature. It is not unusual to spot sloths lounging at eye-level, hear monkeys howling over birdsong, and encounter exotic reptiles at every turn. There is no shortage of sights to see or activities for the visitor to Puerto Viejo. Exploring the nearby national parks, bike riding from beach to beach, cafe hopping, chocolate tasting, yoga- it can all be done in a day or two, but is better spread over a week, or more. Adventure excursions and are easily arranged and well-managed, and eco-tours with informed naturalist guides may be found with a little looking. The nightlife starts late, after 10:30, and it's a casual scene that rotates between a few places- Puerto Viejo's laid back night-life starts late, after 11pm. Reggae music and reefer waft over the town, reminders of the town's roots in Jamaica and Rastafari culture. The

town's most famous spot for surf is Salsa Brava, and fine waves break at Cocles Beach, too. It's easy to see why many travelers leave with dreams of returning, and why plenty never leave at all. The tranquilo life found in this little neck of the woods simply epitomizes "la pura vida."  
© NileGuide

## Hotel Insights

### Hotels

#### In Puerto Viejo

For a longer stay, close to town, you might want to check out **Cashew Hill Jungle Cottages**(tel. 2750-0256; www.cashewhillodge.co.cr). On a hill just on the outskirts of town, these are simple but immaculate individual one- and two-bedroom bungalows, with kitchenettes.

**Moderate**-- In addition to the hotel listed below, **Escape Caribeño**(tel. 2750-0103; www.escapecaribeno.com), is another good option in this price range, located on the outskirts of town, just south of Salsa Brava.

**Inexpensive**-- True budget hounds will find an abundance of basic hotels andcabinas in downtown Puerto Viejo in addition to those listed. Of these, **Hotel Pura Vida**(tel./fax 2750-0002; www.hotel-puravida.com) and **Kaya's Place**(tel. 2750-0690; www.kayasplace.com) are both good bets; however, the most popular spot for backpackers, surfers, and students is **Rocking J's**(tel. 2750-0657; www.rockingjs.com), a sprawling compound offering simple rooms, camping spaces, and a "hammock hotel."

#### Between Puerto Viejo & Manzanillo

All the hotels listed are located along the road south of Puerto Viejo heading toward Manzanillo. This is one of the most beautiful and isolated stretches of beach in Costa Rica. The single coastal road here has been paved all the way to Manzanillo, greatly improving access to this area. I recommend that you rent a car if you plan to stay at one of these hotels because public transportation is sporadic and taxis aren't always available. If you arrive by bus, however, a rented bicycle or scooter might

be all you need to get around once you are settled.

**Very Expensive**-- The former tent camp **Almonds & Corals Hotel**(tel. 2272-2024 reservations in San José, or 2759-9057 at the hotel; www.almondsandcorals.com) now offers rustically luxurious bungalows and suites in a lush forest setting near Manzanillo.

**Moderate**-- Although I find all of the options listed in this section far more charming, surfers might look into **Totem**(tel. 2750-0758; www.totemsite.com), which offers very comfortable rooms, set just off the road, right in front of the beach break in Playa Cocles.

**Inexpensive**-- Down in Manzanillo, the simple **Cabinas Something Different**(tel. 2759-9014) is a good option, while **Congo Bongo**(tel. 2759-9016; www.congo-bongo.com) offers fully equipped houses in a lush forest setting.

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## Restaurants Insights

### Restaurants

#### In Puerto Viejo

To really sample the local cuisine, you need to look up a few local women. Ask around for **Miss Dolly**, **Miss Sam**, **Miss Isma**, and **Miss Irma**, who all serve up sit-down meals in their modest littlesodas. In addition to locally seasoned fish and chicken served with rice and beans, these joints are usually a great place to find somepan bon(a local sweet, dark bread), ginger cakes,paty(meat-filled turnovers), androndon. Just ask around for these women, and someone will direct you to them. In a similar vein, but with a fancier, large restaurant space, is **Miss Elena Brown**, who has set up shop on the outskirts of downtown, on the road heading south.

If you're looking for a light bite for breakfast, lunch, or a snack, check out **Pan Pay**(tel. 2750-0081), a French-run bakery and sandwich shop located next to Johnny's Place. Also, **Jammin' Juice and Jerk Center**(tel. 8826-4332), in the same

## Puerto Viejo Snapshot continued

building, specializes in jerk chicken, salads, and fresh juices. For casual fare, try **E-Z Times**(tel. 2750-0663), which is right in front of the water near the heart of town, and for Thai and Middle Eastern fare, head to **Chile Rojo**(tel. 2750-0025).

Puerto Viejo has a glut of excellent Italian restaurants; in addition to the places listed below, **Amimodo**(tel. 2750-0257) and **Trattoria da Cesare**(tel. 2750-0161) are both fine restaurants.

For breakfasts, desserts and hearty, healthy lunches, there's **Bread& Chocolate**(tel. 2750-0723). And if you're just looking for something to cool you off, try the new **Mighty River's Ice Cream& Coffee Shop**(tel. 2750-2016), which has delicious homemade ice cream.

### That Rundown Feeling--

Rundown(orrondon) soup is a spicy coconut milk-based soup or stew made with anything the cook can run down-- it usually includes a mix of local tubers(potato, sweet potato, or yuca), other vegetables(carrots or corn), and often some fish and/or seafood. Be sure to try this authentic taste of the Caribbean.

### Between Puerto Viejo& Manzanillo

As the beaches stretching south of Puerto Viejo keep getting more popular, there has been a corresponding increase in the number of places to grab a meal. In addition to the restaurants listed above and below, **Johanna Restaurante**(tel. 8887-6203) in Playa Cocles, and **Cabinas Selvyn**(no phone) at Punta Uva, are both excellent options for local cuisine and fresh seafood.

Finally, if you make it as far south as Manzanillo, **Restaurant Maxi**(tel. 2759-9086) is your best bet. This open-air spot is always packed, especially for lunch. A fresh-fish plate will cost you between\$5 and\$8(£2.50-£4); lobster, in season, will cost around\$14(£7). Whatever you order comes with rice and beans,patacones(fried plantain chips), and a small side of cabbage salad.

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## Nightlife Insights

### Nightlife

There are two main disco/bars in town. **Johnny's Place** is near the Rural Guard station, about 100m(328 ft.) or so north of the ATEC office. You'll find **Stanford's** overlooking the water out near Salsa Brava just as the main road heads south of town. Both have small dance floors with ground-shaking reggae, dub, and rap rhythms blaring. The action usually spills out from the dance floor at both joints on most nights. I like the atmosphere better at Johnny's, although both have tables, chairs, and candles set out on the sand, near the water's edge.

One of the more popular places in town is **Hot Rocks**, a large dirt lot with some canvas catering tents over its bar and some of its table area. This place, which is located right where the main road hits the water, has a huge screen upon which several late-run movies are projected each night. Another option is the **Sunset Bar**, which is near the water, beside the bus station, and sometimes features live music. For a more sophisticated ambience try the downtown **Baba Yaga**, or the ocean-side **E-Z Times**. An open-air bar on the second floor of **Soda Tamara** is a casual and quiet place to gather after dark. Finally, for a more local scene, check out **Bar Maritza's**, which really seems to go off on Sunday nights.

You can also take advantage of the pool table, board games, and DirecTV(usually showing sporting events) at **El Dorado**, in front of the ATEC office, as an alternative to the loud music and dance scenes of the other joints mentioned above.

Heading just south out of town, the **Cut Back** is a popular spot with backpackers and bohemians, with a solid after-hours scene. Farther south of town, at the start of Playa Cocless, **El Tesoro** shows large-screen movies every night.

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## Things to Do Insights

### Attractions

### Not Your Everyday Gardens

One of the nicest ways to spend a day in Puerto Viejo is to visit the **Finca La Isla Botanical Gardens**(tel. 2750-0046 or 8886-8530;crgarden@mac.com), a couple hundred meters inland from the Black Sand Beach on a side road just north of El Pizote lodge. Peter Kring and his late wife Lindy have poured time and love into the creation of this meandering collection of native and imported tropical flora. You'll see medicinal, commercial, and just plain wild flowering plants, fruits, herbs, trees, and bushes. Visitors get to gorge on whatever is ripe at the moment. There's also a rigorous rainforest loop trail leaving from the grounds. The gardens are generally open Friday through Monday from 10am to 4pm, but visits at other times can sometimes be arranged in advance. Entrance to the garden or loop trail is \$5(£2.50) per person, or\$10(£5) with the guided tour.

**Cacao Trails**(tel. 2756-8186; www.cacaotrails.com) is a one-stop attraction featuring botanical gardens, a small serpentarium, an open-air museum demonstrating the tools and techniques of cacao cultivation and processing, and a series of trails. There's also a large open-air restaurant, and a swimming pool for cooling off. You can also take canoe rides on the bordering Carbon River, and even watch sea turtles lay their eggs during the nesting season. Admission to the attraction is\$25(£13), including a guided tour. A full-day tour, including lunch and a canoe trip, as well as the guided tour, costs\$47(£24). During turtle nesting season, they do night tours to watch sea turtles lay their eggs.

Near Punta Uva, you'll find the **Punta Uva Butterfly Garden**(tel. 2750-0086).

This small yet well-run facility is the only butterfly-breeding and production facility along the coast, and it's open daily from 8am to 4pm. Admission is\$5(£2.50) for adults; children enter free.

Finally, down around Playa Chiquita, at the Tree House Lodge, there's the **Green Iguana Conservation Tour**(tel. 2750-0706; www.greeniguana.com). This educational tour focuses on the life cycle, habits, and

## Puerto Viejo Snapshot continued

current situation of this endangered reptile. The tour features a walk around a massive natural enclosure, as well as a video presentation. The cost is \$15 (£7.50).

### South Caribbean Music Festival

Each year, the folks at Playa Chiquita Lodge organize a month-long festival of concerts and workshops featuring local and national musical groups and solo artists. The dates vary, but the festival tends to fall somewhere during the months of March and April and always ends the week before Easter. Concerts are usually held on Friday and weekends at Playa Chiquita Lodge and other venues around the area.

### Shopping

Puerto Viejo attracts a lot of local and international bohemians, who seem to survive solely on the sale of handmade jewelry, painted ceramic trinkets (mainly pipes and cigarette-lighter holders), and imported Indonesian textiles. You'll find them at makeshift stands set up by the town's *sparquécito* (little park), a few wooden benches in front of the sea between Soda Tamara and Stanford's.

In addition to the makeshift outdoor stands is a host of well-stocked gift and crafts shops in town. The **Jewelry Factory** and **Color Caribe**, both on the main road into town, sell a wide range of jewelry, crafts, and gift items, as well as Costa Rican hammocks. **Luluberlu**, located inland across from Cabinas Guaraná, features locally produced craftwork, including shell mobiles and mirrors with mosaic-inlaid frames, as well as imports from Thailand and India. For ceramics, head south to Playa Chiquita and check out the traditional Japanese-style works at **Raku Art**.

**Tip:** My favorite local purchase is locally produced chocolate, which comes wrapped in wax paper the size and shape of a roll of quarters. They come plain or flavored with coconut, peanuts, mint, ginger, or raisins, and can be found for sale at many gift shops and restaurants around town. Finally, if you need a book to read on the beach, head just south of town to **Echo Books**, which has a good supply of new and used books, as well as a small cafe and gift shop. The owner also specializes

in making homemade truffles and other chocolate treats from local cacao.

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## Travel Tips

### Planning a Trip

#### Getting There & Departing

**By Plane**-- The closest airport to Puerto Viejo is in Limón. A taxi from the airport to Cahuita should cost around \$20 (£10). Alternately, you can just walk the long block from the airport terminal to the main road south and flag down any of the frequent buses that pass by.

**By Car**-- To reach Puerto Viejo, continue south from Cahuita for another 16km (10 miles). Watch for a prominent fork in the highway. The right-hand fork continues on to Bribri and Sixaola. The left-hand fork (it actually appears to be a straight shot) takes you into Puerto Viejo on 5km (3 miles) of paved road.

**By Bus**-- **Mepe** express buses (tel. **2257-8129** in San José, or 2750-0023 in Puerto Viejo) to Puerto Viejo leave San José daily at 6 and 10am, noon, and 2 and 4pm from the new Caribbean terminal (Gran Terminal del Caribe) on Calle Central, 1 block north of Avenida 11. The trip's duration is 4 1/2 to 5 hours; the fare is \$7 (£3.50). During peak periods extra buses are sometimes added. Always ask if the bus is going into Puerto Viejo (you do not want to get dropped off at the turnoff for Sixaola) and if it's continuing on to **Manzanillo** (especially helpful if you're staying in a hotel south of town). Regardless, don't be surprised if it doesn't do exactly what you were told.

**Gray Line** (tel. **2220-2126**; [www.graylinecostarica.com](http://www.graylinecostarica.com)) has a daily bus that leaves San José for Puerto Viejo at 9:30am. The fare is \$33 (£17). The return bus leaves Puerto Viejo at 7am. **Interbus** (tel. **2283-5573**; [www.interbusonline.com](http://www.interbusonline.com)) has a daily bus that leaves San José for Puerto Viejo at 7:50am. The fare is \$35 (£18). Interbus buses leave Puerto Viejo daily at both 7am and 2:50pm. Both companies will pick you up at most area hotels in both

San José and Puerto Viejo, and both offer connections to various other destinations around Costa Rica.

Alternatively, you can catch a bus to **Limón** and then transfer to a Puerto Viejo-bound bus in Limón. These latter buses (tel.

**2758-1572**) leave roughly every hour between 5am and 6pm from in front of Radio Casino, which is 1 block north of the municipal market. Buses from Limón to Manzanillo also stop in Puerto Viejo and leave daily at 6 and 10:30am and 3 and 6pm. The trip takes 1 1/2 hours; the fare is \$2 (£1).

If you arrive in Puerto Viejo by bus, be leery of hucksters and touts offering you hotel rooms. In most cases, they just work on a small commission from whatever hotel or cabina is hiring, and, in some cases, they'll steer you away from one of my recommended hotels or falsely claim that it is full.

Express buses leave Puerto Viejo for San José daily at 7:30, 9, and 11am, and 4pm. Buses for Limón leave daily at 6 and 9am, and 1, 4, and 5pm. Buses to **Punta Uva** and **Manzanillo** leave Puerto Viejo daily around 7:30am, noon, and 4:30 and 7:30pm. These buses return from Manzanillo at 5 and 8:15am and 12:45 and 5pm.

### Orientation

The road in from the highway runs parallel to Playa Negra, or Black Sand Beach (this is not the same one I talked about in Cahuita), for a couple hundred meters before entering the village of Puerto Viejo, which has all of about 10 dirt streets. The sea is on your left and forested hills on your right as you come into town. It's another 15km (9 1/3 miles) south to Manzanillo. This road is paved all the way to Manzanillo, although some sections are nonetheless in fairly rough shape.

### Fast Facts

**Public phones** are located around town and at several hotels. Those looking to change money should head to the **Banco de Costa Rica** branch on the main road in town. There's also a **Banco Nacional** branch in **Bribri**, about 10km (6 miles) away. Both of these banks have ATMs. You'll

## Puerto Viejo Snapshot continued

find the **post office** in the tiny strip mall behind Café Viejo. There is a **Guardia Rural police office** (tel. **2750-0230**) on the beach, near Johnny's Place.

There are several little Internet cafes around town. There are also a couple of full-service laundromats-- the one at **Café Rico** (tel. **2750-0325**) will give you a free

cup of coffee, cappuccino, or espresso while you wait.

There are a handful of taxi drivers in town. You'll either find them hanging around the *parquecito* (little park), or you can try calling **Bull** (tel. **2750-0112** or 8836-8219) or **Delroy** (tel. **2750-0132**). You can rent scooters and bicycles from several

operators in town. I like **Sucurucú** (tel. **2750-0700**), which is just south of the bus stop, and **Dragon Scooter Rentals** (tel. **2750-0728**), which is across from the restaurant Salsa Brava, at the stand for **Aventuras Bravas**.

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