

HOW TO INVEST IN TOURIST PROPERTIES

in La Fortuna, San Carlos, Costa Rica

Everything you need to know before investing in Costa Rica's #1 tourist destination

- ✓ Types of properties and real returns
- ✓ Monetization strategies
- ✓ Legal framework for foreigners and nationals
- ✓ Mistakes that cost thousands of dollars

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Introduction

Imagine waking up every morning knowing your property is generating income while the Arenal Volcano dominates the horizon and the sounds of nature surround you. That is not a fantasy — it is the reality of hundreds of investors who bet on La Fortuna de San Carlos.

La Fortuna has become the fastest-growing tourist destination in Costa Rica. With more than 1.2 million annual visitors, an expanding tourist infrastructure, and lodging demand that exceeds available supply, opportunities to invest in tourist properties here are real, solid, and accessible — for both Costa Ricans and foreigners.

This guide was created to give you a clear, honest, and practical view of what it means to invest in this market: the types of properties, the legal framework, monetization strategies, and the mistakes you must avoid from the start.

What you will achieve with this guide:

- Understand the tourist property market in La Fortuna
- Know the types of investment and their real returns
- Understand the legal framework for nationals and foreigners
- Identify the most costly mistakes and how to avoid them
- Know the concrete next steps to invest

CHAPTER 01

Why Is La Fortuna the Ideal Market?

"The most valuable land is not the cheapest, but the one with the greatest growth potential."

La Fortuna de San Carlos is not simply a tourist village. It is an economic ecosystem in full expansion, backed by one of the most recognized natural icons in the world: the Arenal Volcano.

Factors that make La Fortuna an exceptional market:

- **Sustained tourist demand:** Tourism in the Zona Norte of Costa Rica grows year after year, with a high season practically all year long thanks to national and international visitors.
- **Expanding infrastructure:** Improvements in roads, new hotels, restaurants, tours, and services that increase the destination's appeal and property values.
- **Scarcity of quality supply:** The demand for premium accommodation exceeds available supply, which keeps rates high and occupancy elevated.
- **Political and legal stability:** Costa Rica offers one of the most stable legal frameworks in Latin America for foreign investment.
- **Proven capital appreciation:** Property values in La Fortuna have grown consistently over the last 10 years.

The market in numbers:

Indicator	Data
Annual visitors (La Fortuna)	+1.2 million
Average occupancy rate (high season)	85% – 95%
Average nightly rate (cabin/apartment)	\$80 – \$250 USD
Estimated annual return (Airbnb/rental)	8% – 18% on investment
Property value growth (last 5 years)	+30% – +60%

■ KEY FACT

La Fortuna has year-round demand: during the high season (December–April and July) from international tourism, and during the low season from domestic tourism and Costa Rican weekend travelers.

CHAPTER 02

Types of Properties and Their Returns

Not all investments are equal. The type of property you choose will determine your initial investment level, the operational effort required, and the return you can expect. Here are the main categories in the La Fortuna market.

01. Cabins and Tourist Villas

Initial Investment	\$80,000 – \$300,000 USD
Estimated Return	10% – 18% annually
Platforms	Airbnb, VRBO, Booking.com
Ideal for	Investors seeking quick returns and active or delegated management
Key advantage	High demand, flexible seasonal pricing

02. Boutique Hotels and Small Hotels

Initial Investment	\$300,000 – \$1,500,000 USD
Estimated Return	8% – 15% annually (more stable)
Ideal for	Investors with more capital seeking solid assets
Key advantage	Own brand, full operational control, higher resale value

03. Farms and Tourist Land

Initial Investment	\$50,000 – \$500,000 USD
Estimated Return	Capital appreciation + agrotourism income
Ideal for	Patient investors seeking capital growth
Key advantage	Lower price per m ² , enormous development potential

04. Vacation Apartments and Condominiums

Initial Investment	\$60,000 – \$200,000 USD
Estimated Return	8% – 14% annually
Platforms	Airbnb, Booking.com
Ideal for	First-time investors or those seeking diversification
Key advantage	Simpler management, lower maintenance costs

■ ■ TIP

For a first-time investor, a cabin or vacation apartment managed on Airbnb is the most accessible entry point with the best cash flow from the first year. You can later scale to larger properties.

CHAPTER 03

Legal Framework: What You Need to Know

"Investing without knowing the legal framework is like building a house without a foundation."

Costa Rica is one of the most investor-friendly countries for foreign investment in Latin America. However, there are specific legal aspects of the tourist real estate sector that you must know before signing any document.

Rights of Foreigners:

In Costa Rica, foreigners have the same rights as nationals to buy, sell, and own real estate. You do not need residency or citizenship to be a property owner. This is one of the country's great advantages over other Latin American destinations.

Types of Land Tenure:

Type	Description	Recommendation
Registered private property	Title registered in the National Registry. Maximum legal size 100 hectares.	■ Ideal for all investments
Maritime Terrestrial Zone (ZMT)	200m strip from the coast. Cannot be purchased, only leased.	■ Requires specialized legal advice
Unregistered land	No registered deed. High risk of disputes.	■ Avoid without legal review

Step-by-Step Purchase Process:

1. Identify the property and verify the title in the Costa Rica National Registry
2. Hire a trusted local attorney (essential)
3. Conduct due diligence: liens, mortgages, taxes up to date, land use
4. Sign letter of intent or purchase agreement with deposit (generally 10%)
5. Execute deed before a Costa Rican notary public
6. Registration in the National Registry (timeframe: 30–90 days)
7. Payment of transfer taxes (1.5% of the deed value in total)

■ IMPORTANT

Never sign a contract without your attorney having verified the registry study. In Costa Rica there are properties with double registrations or hidden encumbrances that can only be detected through a professional review.

CHAPTER 04

Strategies to Monetize Your Property

"A property that does not work for you is an expense. A well-managed property is an asset."

Buying a property in La Fortuna is just the first step. The key is how you manage it and what channels you use to maximize its profitability.

Strategy 1: Airbnb and Vacation Rental Platforms

Platforms like Airbnb, VRBO, and Booking.com are the most profitable strategy for tourist properties in La Fortuna. With good professional photography and active management, it is possible to achieve occupancy rates of 70% to 90% throughout the year.

- **Dynamic pricing:** adjust rates according to season and demand
- **Professional photography:** first mandatory investment
- **Fast response to inquiries:** platforms reward active hosts
- **Delegated management:** local property manager (cost: 15–25% of income)

Strategy 2: Long-Term Rental

If you prefer stable income and less management, long-term rental to tourist operators or local professionals is a solid option with greater cash flow predictability.

Strategy 3: Hybrid Model (Recommended)

Combine Airbnb during the high season with monthly rental during the low season, maximizing annual occupancy and reducing periods without income. This is the strategy most used by experienced investors in La Fortuna.

■ EXERCISE

Calculate your break-even rate: how many nights per month do you need to rent to cover mortgage + maintenance + utilities. That is your minimum occupancy target.

CHAPTER 05

Mistakes That Cost Thousands of Dollars

"Knowledge of others' mistakes is the cheapest investment that exists."

Error 1: Buying Without Verifying the Title	The most dangerous mistake. Properties with registration problems or hidden encumbrances can cause you to lose your entire investment. Always verify the folio real in the National Registry before committing.
Error 2: Underestimating Maintenance Costs	A property in a tropical zone requires constant maintenance. Budget 10–15% of annual income for maintenance, repairs, and improvements.
Error 3: Not Having Local Representation	Managing a property remotely without a local representative is a recipe for disaster. A trusted property manager protects your investment.
Error 4: Ignoring Tax Obligations	Rental income is subject to income tax in Costa Rica. Consult a local accountant from the beginning to avoid surprises.
Error 5: Buying on Emotion, Not Data	La Fortuna is beautiful and easy to fall in love with. Always analyze: location, access, services, land use, and appreciation projections before deciding.

Conclusion and Next Steps

La Fortuna de San Carlos represents one of the most solid real estate investment opportunities in Costa Rica. The combination of growing tourist demand, stable legal framework, and proven capital appreciation creates an ideal environment to build wealth.

What you learned in this guide is the starting point. The next step is to act with information, professional support, and a clear strategy.

Summary of what you learned:

- La Fortuna has sustained and growing tourist demand
- There are 4 types of investment with returns of 8% to 18% annually
- Foreigners have the same rights as nationals to invest
- The key is management and the right distribution channel
- Avoiding common mistakes can save you thousands of dollars

Your next steps:

1. Define your budget and risk profile
2. Contact a trusted local real estate specialist
3. Visit La Fortuna and explore the highest-potential areas
4. Request property analyses within your investment range
5. Hire a local attorney before signing any document

Ready to Invest in La Fortuna?

At Wisacor, Real Estate 2026 we accompany you at every step: from finding the ideal property to legal closing and managing your investment. Contact us today.

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This eBook was created by Wisacor, Real Estate 2026 — specialists in tourist property investments in the Zona Norte of Costa Rica.