



## First Look: Islas Secas Reserve and Lodge



*Courtesy Isla Secas*

Pulling up to Islas Secas Reserve and Lodge, a gorgeous new property off [Panama's](#) southern Pacific Coast, it is quite possible that the *Jurassic Park* soundtrack will pop into your head. Some 15 miles off the mainland, 14 densely forested islands rise from the sea like ancient creatures — majestic and pristine. Frigate birds soar overhead, pelicans glide beside the boat, and every now and then a fish or sting ray cuts through the turquoise-blue waters, as if they, too, were leaping for joy, aware of the privilege of being in such a special place.



Courtesy Islas Secas

Islas Secas calls itself “reserve and lodge” — and that order is not arbitrary. Louis Bacon, the conservation philanthropist behind Alaska’s Tordrillo’s Mountain Lodge and the Taos Ski Valley, is fiercely focused on sustainable, off-the-grid luxury. Some 75 percent of Islas Secas has already been conserved in perpetuity, assuring that especially the diverse marine ecosystem found here will be safeguarded. Secas could have easily turned into the Bacon family’s personal playground, but luckily this passion project can now be experienced by small number of guests (there are no more than eighteen at a time).

In many ways, Islas Secas functions like a nautical version of an African safari lodge, with minimal human impact in the wild, and a host of guided activities available to guests.

**Related: [Just Back From: Panama](#)**



Courtesy Islas Secas

All man-made structures are located on the main Isla Cavada, and they include the four guest casitas, La Terazza restaurant, a stylish (and air-conditioned) bar and library, and an activities center stocked with scuba and snorkel gear. Designed for minimal impact, the structures all blend into the lush landscapes.

The humbly named “casitas” are actually one-, two- and three-bedroom villas all built in enviable cliffside locations to maximize views. Each of them has an open floor plan, and interiors very much in line with the eco-friendly island concept. The woods are certified sustainable, including the smooth ipé floors from Brazil and furniture made from reclaimed Indian mahogany.

Walls are paneled with thick wooden slats that open to let in the island sounds and ocean air (there are excellent fly screens throughout; there’s air conditioning for those who require it). Large sliding doors spill onto a wrap-around deck, with plunge pools and overstuffed day beds beneath thatched palapas. Lovely local touches abound: there’s a small kitchenette, homemade local snacks, beach bags, sun hats and binoculars for bird-watching during the day and star-gazing at night (no light pollution here).

**Related:** [Home Sweet Bocas](#)





Courtesy Islas Secas

There's no set itinerary. Guests map out their days with the engaged Secas team, deciding whether to go snorkeling, scuba diving or fishing—the latter is a particular draw, as the Gulf of Chiriqui's bounty includes large marlin, tuna and snappers. Less strenuous activities include a private island picnic on a picture-perfect white sand beach on nearby Isla Pargo or a jungle walk, led by naturalist Rob Jameson, whose passion for the local flora and fauna is utterly contagious.

On my final evening at Secas, while kayaking back to my casita from nearby Playa Canales, I thought about the lengthy trip to arrive at this special place. Unlike some flop-and-drop destinations in the [Caribbean](#) or [Mexico](#), Secas takes time and patience to reach. But watching a group of pelicans as I glided close by, across an utterly calm lagoon and beneath the big open sky, I was reminded of the welcome card I had found in my room on the first day. "Sometimes," — it read — "it's the journey that teaches us about the destination."

***[Contact Indagare](#) for assistance planning a customized trip to Panama.***

---

- Simone Girner on June 5, 2018

