

# Central Costa Rica

*Simple Concepts*

BY MARK SALVETTI

PHOTOS BY MARK SALVETTI & WENDY SOLANO



Sunset at Vista Guapa with the custom YOLO Air  
From left: Rolando Herrera Siles, 6'10"; Alvaro Solano, 6'10"; Jack Archer, 7'0"; Troy Archer, 7'4"; Jeff Archer, 9'0"; Mark Melancon, 9'4"; Mark Salvetti, 9'10"; Randy Lachney, 10'6"

During a sunset paddle at Herradura Bay, calm and warm waters make for great flatwater fun.



*Whether you are an advanced SUP surfer looking to push yourself and hone your surfing skills or a beginner, Vista Guapa Surf Camp in Costa Rica can help you immerse yourself in the “pura vida” of this special country.*

The concept was simple: Create a slice of heaven for all to come and experience “pura vida,” the national expression of Costa Ricans, meaning “pure life,” “hello,” “goodbye,” “right on” or “thank you.” From its humble beginnings, Vista Guapa Surf Camp in Costa Rica now leads the way in new possibilities to experience all that is “pura vida” in this beautiful Central American country.

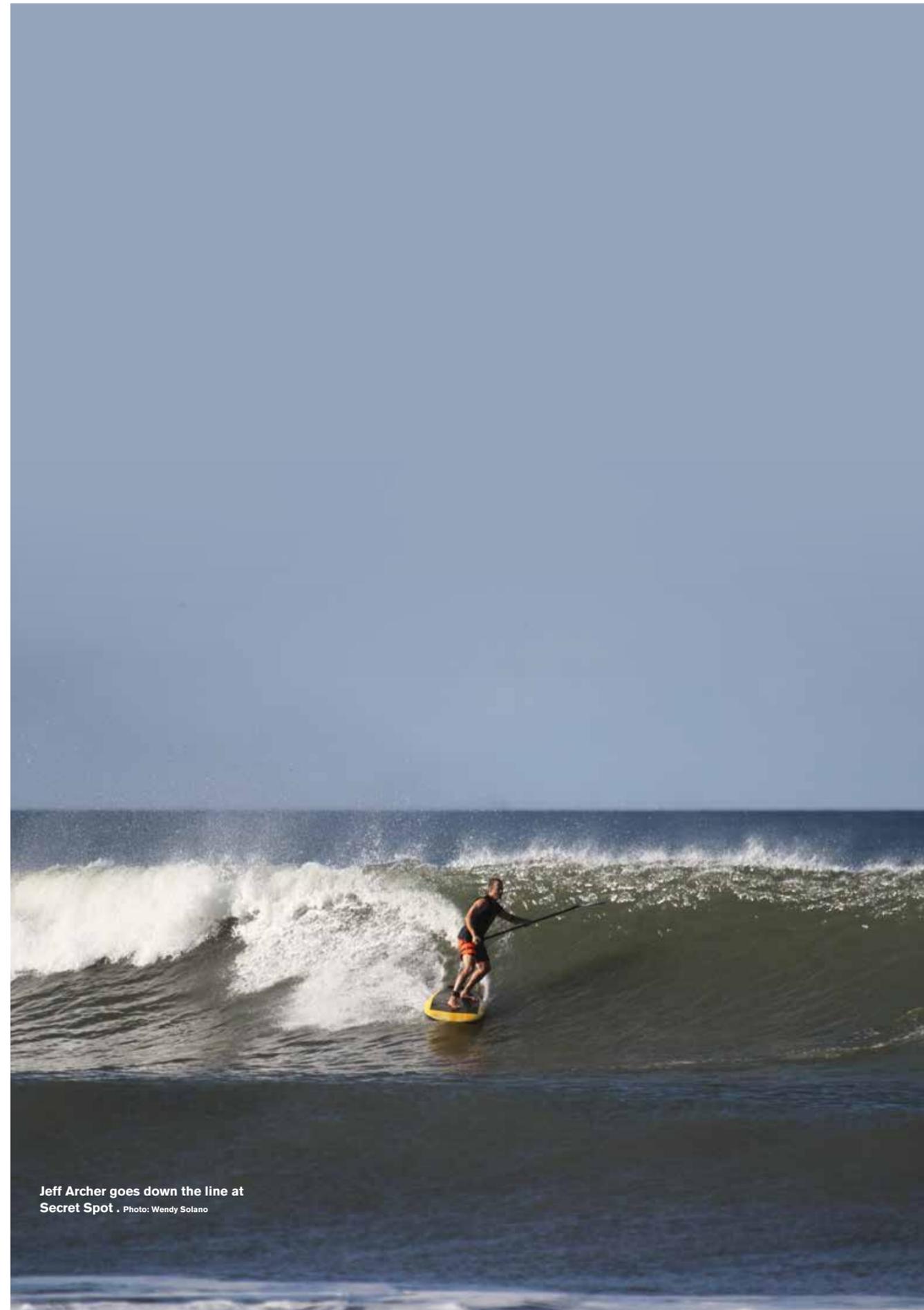
Alvaro Solano has created this special place in Jacó, a small, bustling resort town on the Pacific Coast along a crescent-shaped beach. It boasts more than 20 empty surf breaks easily reached within a few minutes’ drive. The camp setup is ideal: Guest cabins are perched high above the town on a protected hilltop where you can enjoy your morning coffee. You are able to breathe in the beauty of the sunrise before you head down for your early morning surf session. With your appetite built up, you head back to the camp for an amazing breakfast that fuels your day. Dinners are enjoyed as one large family at one of the many restaurants in town; we get there by the camp’s van. Meals are definitely meant to be enjoyed here.

On one of my first trips here, in 2006, I bombarded Alvaro with

photos of my new SUP back in the States. We collaborated on a plan to import SUP boards to Costa Rica to offer guests an alternative to surfing at the camp. On a whim, I placed a call to a new SUP company in Florida, YOLO Board. Owner and founder Jeff Archer picked up the phone that day. Five minutes later we were thick as thieves with a plan to ship boards to Costa Rica. In the fall of 2010 we had our first group of YOLO Board paddlers at the camp to host the YOLO Experience Camps to Vista Guapa. We had boards and the concept, and now we were ready to share Vista Guapa with anyone who would listen.

Now the trip is produced three times a year. During Mardi Gras, I lead the camp. It sells out well in advance. YOLO Team riders Westy Westenberger and Christian Cook lead trips during different times of the year. Check [vistaguapa.com](http://vistaguapa.com) for more information. One week at camp provides the total Costa Rican experience: a day packed with surfing and stand-up paddling amid the daily beauty of Costa Rica.

Our recent trip in February 2015 had a delightful group that included six women and six men who varied in skill levels on the water. It was a



Jeff Archer goes down the line at Secret Spot . Photo: Wendy Solano

At Secret Spot, Rolando Herrera Siles  
shows what it's all about on his custom  
6'10" YOLO Air. Photo: Wendy Solano



*The week is packed with activity.*

Most days we return to the camp exhausted and fall asleep by 9:30 p.m., before our heads hit the pillow.

balance of beginners and advanced SUP surfers. Jeff and Jack Archer, Randy Lachney, Mark Melancon and I had a unique experience with the custom-shaped YOLO Air Boards, which were ordered in advance to be ready when we arrived. To our knowledge there is no other surf camp offering this high-end type of service, and it was well worth the effort. Boards ranged from 10'6" down to Jack's 7' custom shape; the boards were extremely light and agile... fast and striking-looking. They paddled extremely well, with an aggressive rocker. We were able to paddle out through big surf with ease, as well as drop in late after pivot turns on a dime. These boards are a game changer if you are interested in progressing your SUP surfing. There aren't many boards out there that can compete with this level of design.

The concept originated at the camp two years ago. Before that trip, Alvaro had his longtime shaper, Javier Orna, create a custom-shaped SUP board for him. About midweek, Alvaro, Javier and Jeff sat down and discussed the YOLO Air series concept. Two years later, several of us ordered custom shapes, with input from Alvaro as to what would work for us. Vista Guapa provides you with the opportunity to consult with an eight-time Costa Rican champion to create your own ability-specific SUP surfing board. For Jack it was small, light and agile, while my board was wider and longer. Alvaro knows I like to swoop, glide

and get in early. The performance and workmanship of all the custom boards exceeded our expectations.

The week is packed with activity. Most days we return to the camp exhausted and fall asleep by 9:30 p.m., before our heads hit the pillow. One of the first nights at the camp, we get a message from Alvaro — "Secret Spot in the morning" — this is a special place known by few locals. Getting there requires an early alarm and an hour drive down some hilly and dusty dirt roads, which lead to an awe-inspiring overlook of a cliff and a left point break. It's simply amazing. The break is empty and we surf for hours, unaware of time. The day is made even more special by our good friend Edwin Rojas, our driver extraordinaire, who cooked up a barbecue lunch on the beach with sausage and gallo pinto, a traditional Costa Rican dish of rice and beans, over a campfire. Adventures like this keep us coming back for more. These small touches are evident every day, making us feel like family, not just guests in a hotel.

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