

Would You Lie Down on a Bed of Bees?

Our writer travels to Costa Rica and confronts her greatest fear
By Elizabeth Lavis

IT IS MY FIRST WEEK IN SÁMARA, Costa Rica, a laid-back beach town with a distinct hippie vibe, and I think I hear my new friend Juls asking me to lie down in her “bean-bag” chair. Verbal misunderstandings can happen to anyone, but this one puts me on a collision course with tens of thousands of bees. It isn’t until Juls leads me back to the palm-frond-festooned gazebo behind her cottage that I quickly realize, to my horror, that Juls isn’t a fan of nostalgic ’70s furniture: She’s a biofeedback practitioner who incorporates bees into her sessions and expects me to lie down in an elaborate box propped over three hives of buzzing, busy bees.

Although bee beds are a new, petrifying concept for me, they’ve been around for ages. It’s believed the Egyptians slept in bee beds, and they’re rapidly moving from the holistic fringe to the mainstream. People pay a lot for this therapy, and Juls, the coolest woman I’d met in Sámara, is offering it to me for free. How can I say no?

“Are you scared, honey?” Juls asks in her warm Texan accent. I’m terrified of bees, so I just look back at her, searching her face for signs that this is all a big joke. Near my right foot, dozens of the insects cluster around a tiny pipe leading deep into the heart of the bed. Curiosity spurs with abject fear, and I boost myself onto the wooden



I imagine the bees below sensing an intruder, rising through the slats and unleashing a tidal wave of stings.

slats. I can hear the three hives humming and can smell the honey. Juls smiles at me as she begins to close the lid, whispering into the descending darkness that each hive contains 8,000 to 10,000 bees.

Settling in for the longest ten minutes of my life, I have an opportunity to contemplate the mysteries of the universe: time, space, anaphylactic shock. I imagine the bees

below sensing an intruder, rallying the troops, rising through the slats and unleashing a tidal wave of stings. Then I try to picture how my friends will react when I tell them about this experience—if I survive.

I am just beginning to forget my buzzing bedmates when I mistake a bead of sweat running down my leg for a bee. I flail and smash my foot onto the slats, then lie in wide-eyed horror and silence, waiting for the angry onslaught of disturbed bees. They don’t come, but Juls does. “How was it, darling?” she asks. “Great,” I say in dazed shock.

The goal, Juls later explains, is for people to switch from what she calls “military mode” to “repair mode” by achieving coherence, when heartbeats mirror breathing and the body enters a state >

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PLATOS CON HISTORIA EN SAVANNAH

EN LA CIUDAD SUREÑA, UNA NUEVA CORRIENTE
CULINARIA CON PROFUNDA TRADICIÓN

87

LA LISTA

Alfred Hitchcock filmó
en estos 5 lugares
icónicos

88

HOTELÉS

Tres propiedades
boutique inspiradas en
localidades únicas

90

VIAJANDO CON DANNY OCEAN

El cantante venezolano
ama los aviones

96

MI CIUDAD

El chef Juan Carlos
Amaya nos invita a su
Cali, Colombia