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# prevue

Destination insight for meeting + incentive planners

## THE NEW CULINARY CREATIVES

TRENDY SPACES  
FROM MONTREAL  
TO MONACO

**MACAU**  
MULTICULTI MEETINGS

**CHICAGO**  
TWEAKS ITS MIDWEST MOXIE

**NEW YORK**  
BIG BLING IN THE BIG APPLE

**NEW ORLEANS**  
THE ROI OF SECOND HELPIN'S

# See you on SAONA



## THINK OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AS INCENTIVE ISLAND FOR THE NEW NORMAL

[ON LOCATION] GREG OATES

The **Dominican Republic** offers the best ROI for large US-based corporate incentives in an offshore destination. It's not just the outstanding EP and all-inclusive pricing, the beaches are a Mastercard "Priceless" ad.

For example, the sun is low around 9am when our group climbs aboard a typical 20-ft fishing scow on the beach at Bayahibe, a little village in the protected *El Parque Nacional del Este* in the southeast. There are another 50 or so full boats with us heading out to sea en masse like some paradisiacal D-Day in reverse. During the 45-minute ride, everyone's mostly silent while appreciating the uncommon perfection of the weather and water until Saona Island pops up on the horizon.

Imagine the ideal beach with blistering white sand, tangled palm trees listing over Tiffany blue water. That's Saona, a stunning atoll with enough space for 500 pax to snorkel in the surf without feeling cramped. There's even a little community with happy pink and yellow wooden homes and storefronts lining the beach displaying vibrant Haitian art for sale.

Your people will never forget their time on Saona. Ever. It's that perfect. And the hotels are only happy to oblige packing a few additional boats with fresh seafood to barbecue and all the Presidente beer, Haitian rum and pineapple margarita mix you want. But it's the ride back that closes the deal. In the late afternoon, the water is like a glass tabletop. We stop for a swim in the clear shallow water, and all you can see are a few hundred bobbing heads with blissful smiles stamped on their faces.

That singular experience hasn't changed in over two decades since the first US groups started visiting the DR regularly. But after visiting again this spring for the **Dominican Annual Tourism Exchange (DATE)** in Punta Cana on the east coast, and 20+ times previous, you get the sense that 2011 will be the year when the resort product fully matures for groups. The DR's edge has always been price point, the people and perfect beaches. Now it has the quality of facilities to target higher-tier group markets.

### DESIGNER DOMINICAN

The first Six Senses spa in the Western Hemisphere is located at **PUNTACANA Resort**, housed inside what we're going to say is the most elegant new colonial building in the Caribbean. A long verandah poking over the beach pool skirts the white 2-story structure designed by Oscar de la Renta, with jalousie windows and towering beam ceilings. Dine either outside by the pool for 100 or book private space off the verandah for 40. For larger groups, the new **Playa Blanca** seafood restaurant is parked right on the white sand in a rustic yet refined bamboo/thatch structure opening out to the sea. Pure Hollywood.

We pulled up a week after the resort unveiled the \$35 million oceanfront Corales Golf Course, one of the largest in the world, with surf crashing against the coral walls buttressing the supremely lush fairways and six oceanfront greens.

"This sends a very solid message that we're committed to creating a destination that offers so much to planners," says

Opposite: Saona Island

Below: Casa de Campo

Michael Fraser, executive director of marketing. "It was 4½ years in the making, and when you add in the Segway tours, new kiteboarding school, the spa and fine dining on one of the world's best beaches, we're a true all-experience Caribbean destination in a low density environment."

Bayahibe is two hours from the resort, and Fraser says that groups also head there for rum tasting and cigar making tours.

"You can taste, smell and touch the ingredients that go into making those. It's a much more authentic experience."

Can you roll your own stogies there, Michael?

"No, you have to actually be able to smoke them afterwards," he laughs. "There's a real art to crafting a fine cigar."

### ALL-INCLUSIVE PUNTA CANA

DATE took place at the 1,800-room **Moon Palace Casino, Golf & Spa Resort Punta Cana**. At press time, the planned rebranding as the **Hard Rock Hotel Punta Cana**, the first all-inclusive Hard Rock in the portfolio, was scheduled for end of year. The immaculate 121-acre resort is massive with one of two main entrances dedicated to group check-ins right off the 65,000-sf conference center. Both main lobbies are connected with a winding indoor corridor where all the shops and majority of restaurants and bars are located, offering every imaginable international cuisine. It's a big plus for keeping groups together.

The property segues well with the Hard Rock image because the suites all have double jacuzzis in the drop-down living area and big double showers—hence the new "Rock Star Suites."

Then there are the actual rock stars.

"This is going to be the biggest party in the Caribbean," says Ginny Davito, vp of incentive/group sales. "We'll be flying in major bands from the US so it's a great way for planners to build excitement into their programs."

The property that really established Punta Cana as a group biz destination was **Barcelo Bavaro Beach Resort** when it opened the first standalone Convention Center on the east coast almost a decade ago. We love this facility because the halls wrapping around the ballrooms have no walls so you're surrounded by water and bursting hibiscus during breaks.

This December, the multi-hotel facility will complete a multi-year comprehensive renovation that's completely reinvigorating the resort. The 488-suite **Barcelo Bavaro Palace Deluxe** has jacuzzis on the balconies and a modish CB2 design. And the 582-room **Barcelo Bavaro Palace's** amenities have been rebuilt with four panoramic restaurants right on the beach, and five à la cartes around the property serving Japanese, Mexican, French, Italian and Spanish. The casino, disco, spa, piano bar and new clubhouse conference space are also all brand new.

### HOUSE IN THE COUNTRY

Bayahibe is 20 minutes from the elegant **Casa de Campo** resort. This locally-owned hotel was the first to lure US groups to the DR, due in part to the Caribbean's best golf facilities, which are even more stellar with David Leadbetter Golf arriving this past January. So there's a layered ambience at Campo that you'll find in any well established community, where old mixes with new and the service is polished and genuine after decades of fine tuning.

Casa de Campo just spent \$30 million renovating its 265 Caribbean colonial guestrooms known for their wall-to-wall French doors, as well as many of the public spaces. The marquee news is the two new restaurants. **The Beach Club by Le Cirque** features revolving chefs from the famed Manhattan restaurant. Likewise, **La Caña Restaurant by Il Circo** serves Mediterranean dishes prepared by chefs visiting from Circo's noted NYC/Vegas eateries. You don't find that a lot in the Caribbean.

There's also dramatic dining at Altos de Chavon next door, a recreated 16<sup>th</sup> century Renaissance village perched atop a cliff overlooking the Chavon River. Or book one of Casa de Campo's 100 villas for group soirees up to 100 pax on the beach while chefs grill fresh seafood caught 500 feet away that morning.

"We're just very private and very exclusive, but always personal," says spokesperson Kim Hutchinson. "Every guest walks away with their own story."

**Dominican Republic Tourism: [godominicanrepublic.com](http://godominicanrepublic.com)**

**PUNTACANA Resort: [puntacana.com](http://puntacana.com)**

**Moon Palace Resort Punta Cana: [palaceresorts.com](http://palaceresorts.com)**

**Barcelo Bavaro Beach Resort: [barcelo.com](http://barcelo.com)**

**Casa de Campo: [casadecampo.com.do](http://casadecampo.com.do)**

