

## Tortuga Bay, Puntacana, D.R.

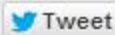
By Cynthia Dial · in Hotels ·



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*“My tastes are simple; I only like the best.”*

(Oscar Wilde)

I like the best, doesn't everyone? With that in mind, it was during my quest to uncover the Dominican Republic's finest that I discovered Puntacana Resort and Club's Tortuga Bay, a private enclave of beachfront villas within the expansive property. At first glance it was obvious that many of the resort's amenities are a result of its geographic positioning—one of the Caribbean's picture postcard perfect locales with sugary white beaches, bathtub warm turquoise water and infinitesimal horizons. But after my comfy stay it was the perks delivered in subtle style (and typically reserved for top-tier VIP's) that captured my attention.

Let's start at the beginning—my airport arrival. Stuck sitting in the back of the plane, my fate was apparent. I'd be one of the last to disembark and one of the last through immigration, losing perhaps a couple hours of the precious afternoon sun in the process. But I was wrong. Seeing a young woman at the base of the stairs holding a sign with my name, my dread changed to welcome. Thus was my introduction to Tortuga Bay's "VIP Whisking Service," a custom treatment given to every guest, which means a personal escort to the front of the line, a private car and an ice cold drink before being reaching the resort. That's what I call arriving in style.



Set on a grassy lawn mere yards from a three mile stretch of private beach called the Coconut Coast, the yellow and white villas are perfectly sited for daily over the water sunrises, one of the many surprises. Whether on your patio or on the sand, it's a prime setting for early morning coffee. A stay here translates to personal use of your own golf cart (your transportation throughout the 105 acre resort) and a private cell phone connecting you 24/7 to the villa manager, whose job is to ensure that your every request is met.

Luxury is no stranger to Puntacana. Fashion designer Oscar de la Renta is one of the partners in the resort, and has designed this property in a genteel Caribbean style, a classic reflection of his Dominican heritage. Its exclusivity has been widely recognized along with its credentials, having received the coveted AAA Five Star Diamond Award, the Dominican Republic's only hotel awarded and one of only four hotels in the Caribbean to claim this distinction. Among the resort's eight restaurants, Bamboo earned the AAA Four Diamond Award and La Yola at Puntacana Marina received the AAA Three Diamond Award. Adding to the buzz is Oscar's recently opened boutique (the first in a resort setting), with the designer's latest collections.



Forty-five holes of golf are the magnet for guests. It's been said that the idea behind the design of Tom Fazio's 18-hole Corales Course was to make "every view a postcard." Set between rocky cliffs and the Caribbean Sea it is indeed picture perfect. The 18-hole La Cana Golf Course is a P.B. Dye designed course, featuring 14 ocean-view holes with four playing right on the water's edge. Top accolades come from Golf Magazine, which compared La Cana to Pebble Beach and declared it the "number one course in the Caribbean." And new on the scene is the nine-hole Hacienda Course, another P.B. Dye creation.

It was not coincidental that the noted golf architect, P.B. Dye, was having breakfast at Bamboo on my first morning of golf. His home is nearby and we chatted about the game and his renowned golf-course-designer father Pete Dye. Mikhail Baryshnikov is also a local homeowner. You see, as a guest of Puntacana it's not uncommon to rub elbows with the who's who. Even the Clintons are known to frequently celebrate the Christmas holidays here. But there's much more to Puntacana than this.

The Six Senses Spa is the only location in the Americas. With master therapists trained in Asian techniques, natural is the guiding principle. Among its regionally authentic offerings are coffee-based body treatments (the D.R.'s coffee is legendary), known for its cellulite fighting properties, making this service one of the most popular.



The resort's marina is the focus of a myriad of water activities. One afternoon we sailed the pristine coast in a catamaran and anchored near sandbars where we relaxed on banks of sand surrounded by the sea, drinking champagne and chatting up the passengers of the other vessels. Dive and fishing charters, scuba diving (coral reef and sunken ships are just offshore), snorkeling, windsurfing, kite surfing, kayaking and paddle surfing round out the water sports menu.

Then there's the private, 1,500 acre ecological reserve. Like finding a swimming hole back in the day, it was after a 10 minute trek into the jungle that we reached a pond, lushly landscaped and complete with a wooden deck and ladder into the cool water. Beyond these temptations there's a tennis center, fitness center, kid's club, petting zoo, horseback riding, ziplining, surf camp,

bicycling and a life-size chess board.

Getting to Puntacana is a cinch. Their international airport is the world's first that is privately owned and operated, with direct flights to and from places like New York, Paris, London, Moscow and Sao Paolo.

I'll gladly raise a flute to Tortuga Bay, a resort wrapped in luxury and living up to my criteria ... the best!

**Tortuga Bay**

Puntacana Resort & Club

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