

# dkc NEWS from

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- 134** **There**  
Puntacana Resort & Club offers up  
the best in green luxury.



Puntacana Resort &amp; Club

THERE

# Mother Nature's Getaway

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC RESORT MAKES RELAXING IN STYLE GUILT-FREE

BY BECCA HENSLEY

**T**HE MAN STARTLES ME. He scares me so much, in fact, that I almost tumble into the cool, clear waters of the natural spring beside me. He has risen from the water, invading the silence of the mangrove forest as intrusively as a predawn alarm clock. “Are you getting in?” he asks, as if he’s known me all his life.

Having already tested the temperature of the water and feeling leery about taking a swim with a strange man in deserted woods, I hesitate. “Come on,” he says. “There are fresh water shrimps over here.” I can’t resist (though I think about it when he tells me the shrimp will nibble my toes), and I plunge in.

This escapade takes place at the **Puntacana Resort & Club in the Dominican Republic**. The natural spring is one of 12 in the verdant Indigenous Eyes Ecological Reserve, a 1,500-acre protected area within the immense resort. And the man is a professor from Virginia Tech on an annual study-abroad trip with his students. Their school is part of the utterly

amazing resort (lucky devils). Here at the **Ecological Foundation and Center for Sustainability**, they study with students from Harvard, Columbia and the like and hobnob with world-renowned scientists to investigate and develop solutions to the world’s environmental challenges and to study tourism and sociology. This unspoiled nature preserve, filled with brightly colored birds, is their classroom, though they also have access to state-of-the-art science labs, not to mention a nearby village.

My day getting lost in the forest is just one of a handful I spend at Puntacana. The paradoxical resort has two hotels, private homes, three golf courses, the ecological preserve, a spa and eight restaurants, yet it’s one of the most intimate places I have been. Attentive staff connect personally with guests while supplying your-wish-is-my-command sort of service. And so many people look me in the eye and wish me a pleasant day that it seems impossible not to have one.

Part of Puntacana’s magic stems from its found-treasure history. Sold to a group of American investors in 1969 for

## BEST BETS

**GETTING THERE:** Most major airlines fly to Puntacana—it’s a straight shot via Atlanta or Houston.

**TO STAY:** Puntacana Resort & Club ([puntacana.com](http://puntacana.com)) is just 10 minutes from its own airport.

**TO EAT:** Enjoy Bamboo, La Yola, Cocoloba, La Choza and more.

**TO SPA:** Try the Six Senses Spa, one of the finest spa brands in the world, known for its hot stone treatment.

**TO GOLF:** Puntacana has three engaging golf courses. Try the brand-new Tom Fazio-designed course, with its multiple holes on the edge of the sea.

**TO BUY:** Presidente beer and Dominican cigars.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 134

\$200,000, this mass of land (26 square miles with five miles of beach) on the eastern shore of the Dominican Republic seemed like a bargain until buyers discovered it was inaccessible. Far from Santo Domingo, this untouched section of the Dominican Republic had no airstrip, no roads, no harbor. It seemed doomed to development failure.

But the principal investor, Theodore Kheel, kept his eye on the prize. He hired an audacious Dominican, Frank Rainieri, to help him realize his dream. For years, they fought an uphill battle that was resolved when they built their own airport (still the **world's first privately owned airport**) and constructed the 355-room Puntacana Hotel. They invested in the local economy: building schools, a hospital and a police station and establishing the now world-renowned ecological foundation, which proved their commitment to protect the environment. True cachet finally arrived when Oscar de la Renta



Each Tortuga Bay villa comes with funky yellow bikes and golf carts

and his good friend Julio Iglesias bought homes and became high-profile investment partners more than a decade ago.

I stay at the jewel in Puntacana's hard-earned crown: **Tortuga Bay**. This eye-catching handful of private villas form their own exclusive hotel. Dominican in mood, with white rooftops and yellow exterior walls, they're scattered on the beach like seashells brought in by the sea. The villas draw from the sophisticated direction of de la Renta, who designed the interiors and much of the furniture. Subdued, soothing colors envelop clutter-free rooms. Open spaces within mirror the landscape, while strategically placed windows showcase the cobalt sea.

If I had the funds like Mikhail Baryshnikov, this is the place I would buy a house (his has a dance studio and can be rented). But while I save up, I'm content with the fact that as a guest of Tortuga Bay, I am whisked through customs and security by a VIP escort—no lines and a comfortable, private waiting room before my flight home. This little amenity tops off a trip that is a treatise on tranquility. 49