



January 2008

SPA HOUND

To ALL the Spas She's Loved Before

OH, JULIO! Where are you, Julio? Come out, come out, wherever you are! Spahound has come to the exclusive island resort of PuntaCana in the Dominican Republic for a taste of the good life and, perhaps, a glimpse of one of its famous residents. Landing at the privately owned international airport, whisked from plane through customs and to the resort in a mere half-hour, Spahound is feeling quite VIP-ish.

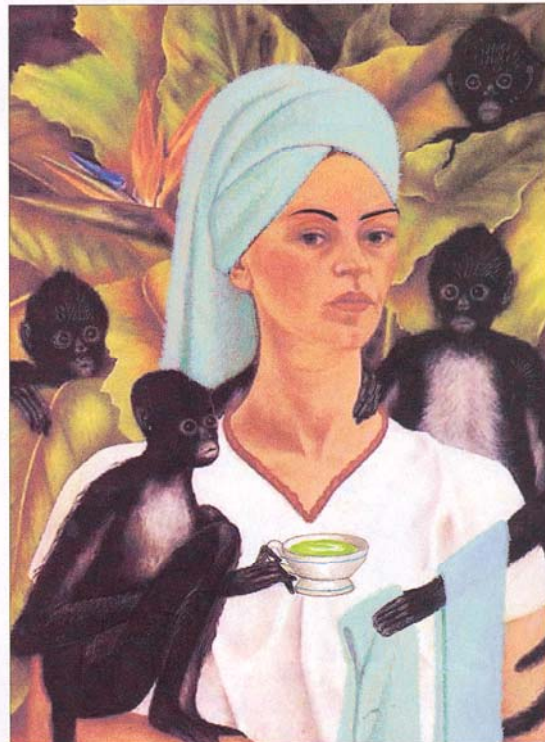
Which is exactly the point. For 20 years, PuntaCana Resort & Club has been a sophisticated tropical escape. Oscar de la Renta and (sigh) Julio Iglesias are among the investors and A-list crowd of celebs (including Mikhail Baryshnikov) who own luxe homes here, and Spahound can see why: Encompassing 15,000 acres of jungle (including a 600-acre nature reserve with spring-fed pools and a biodiversity lab), organic flower and vegetable gardens, golf courses (guests navigate from place to place by personal golf cart), private villas and two upscale hotels—all fringed by pristine white sand beaches—PuntaCana is a gracious slice of paradise.

So when its spa made its debut in 2006, it had to be special: the first Six Senses Spa in the Western Hemisphere. Known for its global roster of skilled therapists and exotic, holistic treatments, this sophisticated brand began in Thailand and has branches in Vietnam, Spain and Greece. Unlike spas with common locker and relaxation rooms, the PuntaCana Six Senses—an intimate, subtle Zen enclave of stone and wood just steps from the beach—has eight indoor treatment rooms,

SIX SENSES SPA
PuntaCana Resort & Club, PuntaCana,
Dominican Republic; 888-442-2262 or
809-959-2262; www.sixsenses.com or
www.puntacana.com



Blissfully steering my golf cart on the seaside path from spa to nature preserve, I know all my senses have been tranquilly tweaked, because I pass the highly polished gate to the Iglesias villa without a frisson.



AS IS COMMON IN "SPA HOUND," WE WONDER HOW CONTEMPORARY SPA TREATMENTS MIGHT HAVE INFLUENCED THE WORK OF A FAMOUS ARTIST, IN THIS CASE THE GREAT FRIDA KAHLO (1907-54).

each a self-contained world with changing room and shower. And that's not to mention two outdoor treatment suites enclosed in a tropical garden. Maximum privacy and relaxation? You got 'em!

I choose the Soul of Six Senses, a 90-minute journey with two therapists incorporating many of the spa's signature treatments. Pat from Thailand and Ayu from Bali lead me to a romantic, candlelit room—bigger than my New York apartment—with two massage tables, seating areas plush with pillows, and a gigantic bathtub. (Yoo hoo, Julio!) Ayu first scrubs and perfumes my feet with sea salt and aromatic oils for a good 10 minutes. Then, already relaxed, I repair to the massage table where, for a good hour-plus, Pat administers a customized facial as →

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Ayu begins a thorough Balinese skin-rolling massage on my legs. Both give me a blissful four-hand, full-body aroma massage, using long, smooth, synchronized strokes. Somewhere in there Ayu (or is it Pat?) provides a stress-relieving scalp massage, incorporating careful hair-pulling techniques and what feels like gentle karate chops. When my 90 minutes are lamentably up, I practically have to be pried off the table. After a cup of hot ginger tea, scalp happily tingling, muscles soothed, face and skin glowing, circulation humming, and calm restored, I fairly waft to the beach.

Afterward, blissfully steering my golf cart on the seaside path from spa to nature preserve, I know all my senses have been tranquilly tweaked, because I pass the bougainvillea-drenched, highly polished mahogany gate to the Iglesias villa without a frisson. Then, as I sit by a crystal-clear spring pool, surrounded by jungle, it hits me: I have found a spa treatment that's—dare I say it?—better than Julio. Lo siento mucho, baby!

—Mary Alice Kellogg