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JOE JOHNSON

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DOMINICAN REPUBLIC'S PUNTACANA RESORT & CLUB DELIVERS OCEANSIDE GOLF, QUIET BEACHES, SOFT ADVENTURE AND ISLAND DINING IN CASUAL ELEGANCE

BY MICHAEL J. SOLENDER

With about two-thirds of the planet covered by ocean currents, it's only logical that many of the world's best golf courses are situated seaside.

Luckily for Tampa Bay area residents, 45 holes of golf's dreamiest Caribbean treasures are close by, alongside the Dominican Republic's east coast at Puntacana Resort & Club. Here, small-ball enthusiasts find three challenging nine-hole courses (Tortuga, Hacienda and Arricife) at the P.B. Dye-designed LaCana Golf Course and another 18 holes at the DR's jewel, Corales Golf Course, designed by Tom Fazio.

Home to the 2020 PGA Tour Corales Puntacana Resort & Club Championship, the Corales course thrills players with no less than six oceanside holes and plenty of opportunities to go low. Host professional of golf, and Corales operations, Jay Overton is a friendly and familiar face Tampa Bay area golfers will immediately recognize when visiting. Overton was the director of golf for three decades at Palm Harbor's Innisbrook Resort.

"Puntacana Resort & Club is very special," Overton says. "The location, safety and security of the resort, the convenience of travel, the airport, the weather, the beaches, the golf courses and the family environment are highlights, but, most importantly, the Dominican people and their warm and genuine friendliness make visiting here a world-class experience. La Cana is an exceptional resort course, and while Corales is a great challenge for the PGA Tour players, the tee options and wide fairways allow all skill levels to enjoy the course."

ROCK-STAR VIP SERVICE

Visitors can be on the course, poolside or strolling along the beach within 30 minutes of touchdown at Punta Cana International Airport. Arrangements for VIP services yield

Above: Playa Blanca smooth sand beach

expedited immigration processing and private transfer to the lush, beachfront Westin Puntacana. Return service facilitates airline check-in and clearing customs at the head of the line—rock-star treatment sure to spoil even the most seasoned travelers.

The Puntacana Resort's 26 square miles of properties, and reserve, provide patrons with many diversions beyond the links. Kitesurfing, paddle boarding, beachside yoga, tennis, Segway touring and scuba diving are easily arranged. Or, curl up with a breezy beach novel and settle in at Playa Blanca. With its smooth, fine sand it's easy to see where the white beach gets its name.

Spa-seekers need look no further than the resort's Six Senses Spa where pampering is decidedly not optional. The holistic mind/body approach to services, and distinctive Zen vibe, leave customers centered, refreshed and renewed through treatments such as Pure Oxygen Antioxidant Facial and Punta Cana Signature Massage with local coconut oil.

Eco-minded patrons are sure to revel in visiting the Puntacana Ecological Foundation. This 1,500-acre ecological park, reserve and research facility carries out environmental initiatives such as sustainable aquaculture, beekeeping, coral reef preservation and programs protecting indigenous animals and birds, such as local iguanas and the Ridgeway's Hawk. Daily tours are offered, with special birder tours and visits to the spring-fed lagoons are especially popular.

DOMINICAN CUISINE

Fresh-from-the-Caribbean seafood, just-harvested produce and special island-spiced flair highlight every meal in the Dominican Republic. Sautéed red snapper, in coconut curry, served with pigeon peas and rice is indicative of a traditional dish served at La Yola, the seaside al fresco restaurant housed beneath a giant thatch-roofed palapa. The sweet, fleshy fish sings with just a hint of heat, perfectly complemented with cool and tangy curry. Mediterranean meets the DR in a fusion that explodes with flavor at Bamboo, the AAA four-diamond restaurant at Tortuga Bay. Poached Sánchez shrimp, orange and mint "tabbouleh," and light tomato foam is the type of dish that is almost too beautiful to eat.

Diners enjoy impeccable service, a comprehensive wine list with surprising global selections including reds from Chile and Argentina, and a casual elegance that make meals here memorable.

The resort's Don Queco Cigar Bar is a must for aficionados of the best island cigars, made extra special when accompanied by a fabled DR rum. A well-stocked humidor tempts with hand-rolled beauties from renowned makers such as Charles Parker, Davidoff and Vivonte. When paired with the finest Dominican rum (Ron Barcelo Imperial, anyone?), there's no better way to close a day in the islands. ♦

La Yola, a seaside al fresco restaurant

Dominican Republic's flavor exploding Cuisine