

# paradise

78 BALANTYNE SUMMER 2017 Escape

Playa Blanca Beach at  
Puntacana Resort & Club

Punta Cana is  
Heaven for Golf,  
Relaxation and  
Tropical Treats

# found



*By Michael J. Solender*

*Photos courtesy of  
Puntacana Resort & Club*



Charlotte's hosting of the PGA Championship at Quail Hollow Club in August is generating a new level of golf fever here, spurring many to seek the ultimate golf holiday.

A look south to the Dominican Republic's Punta Cana on the island's east coast yields Puntacana Resort & Club, a shimmering getaway where salt air, azure seas and balmy trade winds envelop 45 holes of outstanding golf in the Caribbean. Just a three-hour nonstop flight from Charlotte, Punta Cana is an all-season destination where the weather is mild, the beaches stretch for miles and culinary discoveries are true tropical treasures.

The lush 26-square-mile, eco-minded resort includes several accommodation options, which include the Tortuga Bay Hotel, a baker's dozen collection of beachfront villas with interiors designed by Oscar de la Renta, and the Westin Punta Cana, a family-friendly upscale property situated directly on Playa Blanca Beach.

Be as active as you like with kitesurfing, paddle boarding, beachside yoga or tennis on the resort's clay, grass or hard-surface courts. Or, do nothing at all. A good beach novel and a tropical smoothie while lounging poolside are formidable foils for shaking off the hustle of the Queen City.



The Igneri Underwater Museum features 22 sculptures by Dominican artist Thimo Pimentel.

### Oceanside Golf

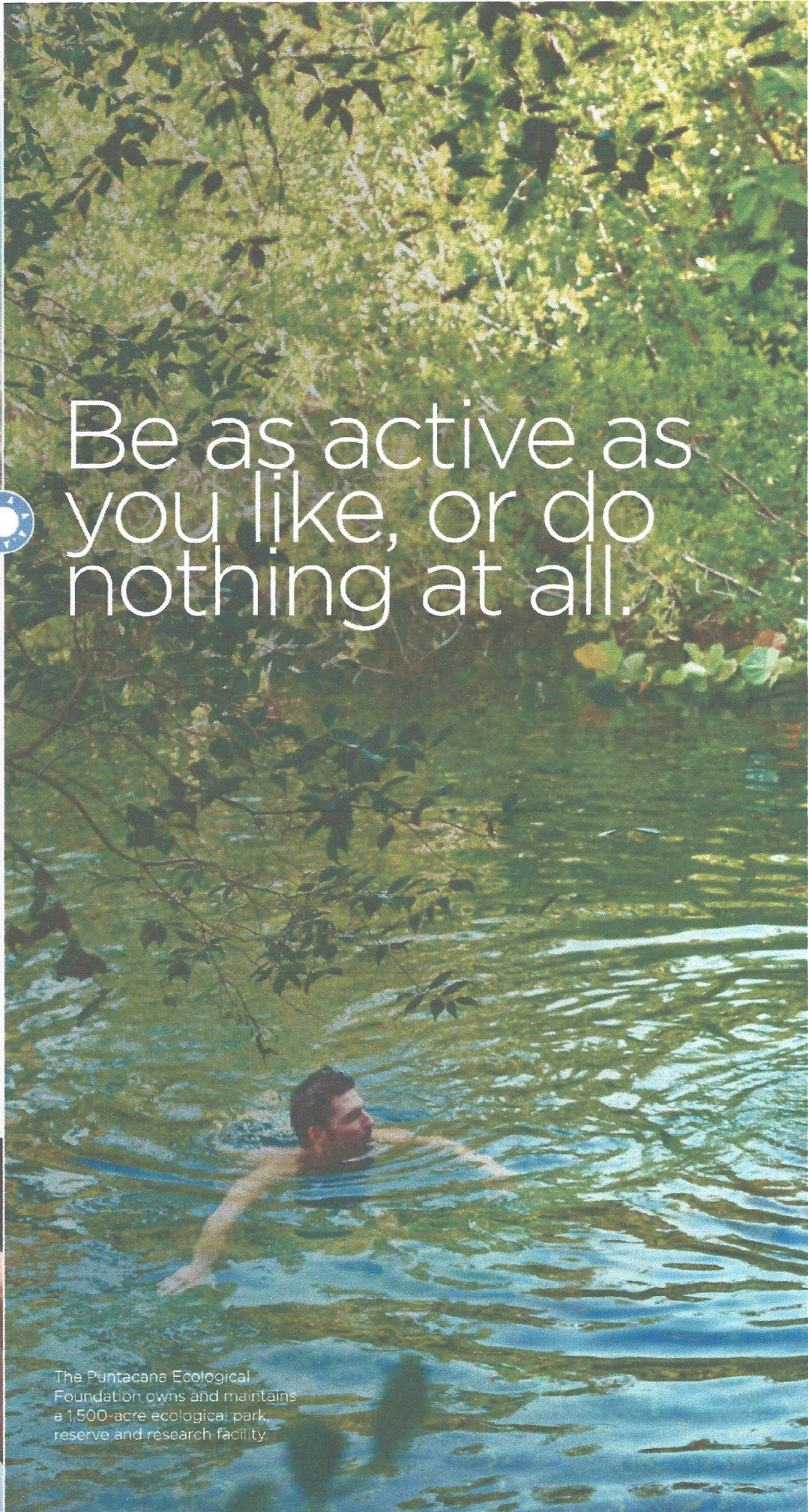
Golf takes center stage at the resort with no star shining brighter than the Tom Fazio-designed Corales Course. With six oceanfront holes, Corales is a visual stunner that plays host to the Web.com Tour's Puntacana Corales Classic, the only PGA stop in the Caribbean.

PGA tour player and Charlotte resident Seamus Power played in the Corales Classic last year, notching a

Charlotte resident Seamus Power played in the Corales Classic last year at Puntacana Resort & Club.



Be as active as you like, or do nothing at all.



The Puntacana Ecological Foundation owns and maintains a 1,500-acre ecological park, reserve and research facility.





Golf Magazine rated La Cana Golf Course No. 1 in the Caribbean.



Dominican cuisine is carefully curated and prepared with colorful island flair.

top-10 finish that helped propel him to receiving his tour card.

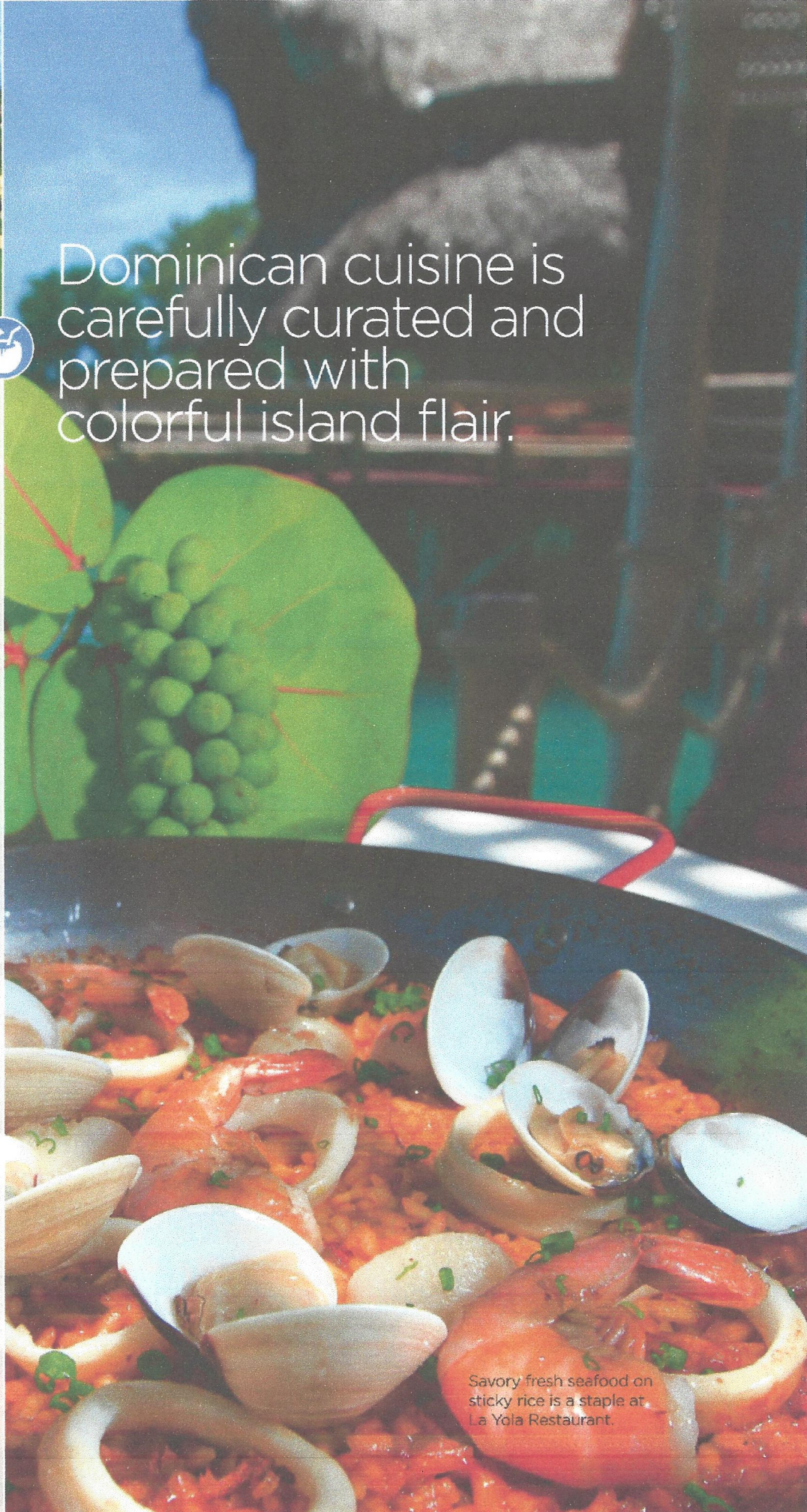
“Corales is a spectacularly beautiful golf course,” says Power. “It’s going to be breezy, but it gives golfers of all skill levels a chance to score well. The fairways are generous, the greens are in fantastic condition and the finishing ocean holes are among the most beautiful I’ve ever seen.”

Nearby, La Cana Golf Course showcases legendary course architect P.B. Dye’s mastery with 27 holes that Golf Magazine rated as the No. 1 course in the Caribbean. “The combination we have in La Cana with 27 holes offers the best of ocean and inland-course designs, testing scratch and weekend golfers alike,” says La Cana head pro George Riley. “The ball sits up nicely on the paspalum turf, always delivering a good lie. People have high expectations when they come to Punta Cana, and we make sure we deliver.”

Both courses make use of paspalum, the environmentally friendly turf receptive to salt-water irrigation and able to thrive in tropical conditions.

### Island Exploration

Golfers aren’t the only ones finding paradise in Punta Cana. Waxhaw resident



Savory fresh seafood on sticky rice is a staple at La Yola Restaurant.



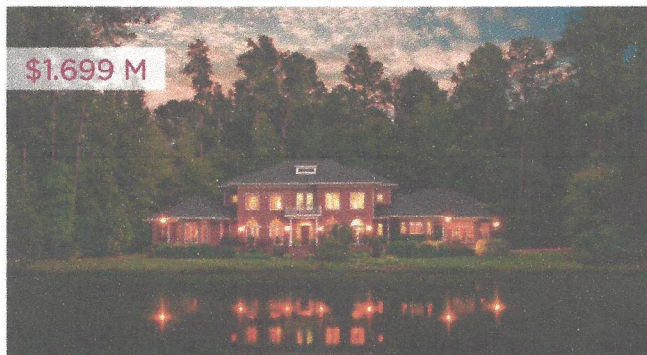
La Yola Restaurant provides open-air dining by the water or under its giant thatched hut called a "palapa."

Jessica Weill grew up in the Dominican Republic and returns home often.

"Punta Cana is a wonderful resort destination and an area of the island that has been carefully developed over the years," says Weill, founder of Weill Fitness, an area nonprofit providing fitness programming for children with special needs. "An absolute must visit while in Punta Cana is an excursion out to Saona, a small offshore island only accessible by boat or catamaran. The water surrounding Saona is crystal clear, and there are natural pools with starfish off extended sandbars, extra-long stretches of white-sand beach and a very relaxing vibe."

Half and full-day excursions to Saona that include lunch, drinks and snorkel gear are available through several tour operators in Punta Cana.

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# Golfers aren't the only ones finding paradise in Punta Cana.



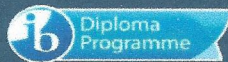
Scuba enthusiasts find an extra-special cultural experience with their dives when visiting the Igneri Underwater Museum. This underwater exhibition features 22 sustainable sculptures created by Dominican artist Thimo Pimentel. Early settlers of what was once known as "La Española" are depicted in these historically accurate underwater artworks.

For "me" time, Six Senses Spa places top priority on pampering guests. Signature treatments include Asian therapies such as Thai and foot acupressure, couple's massage and special treatments for golfers.

Sound and sustainable tourism are demonstrated by Grupo Puntacana, the resort's developer. In 1988,

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Photo courtesy of Jessica Weill

Jessica Weill enjoys time on a catamaran with her brother and nephew as they sail to Saona Island.

the company created the not-for-profit Puntacana Ecological Foundation, donating more than 1,500 acres to create an ecological park, reserve and research facility. Environmental initiatives feature programs protecting the population of the indigenous Ridgway Hawk, coral reef preservation and expansion, sustainable aquaculture in farming tilapia and a fascinating beekeeping project, where protected hives yield not only forest honey but the rare royal jelly as well.

### Dining

Dominican cuisine is carefully curated with the freshest tropical produce, just-caught seafood and locally raised proteins prepared with colorful island flair.

Shrimp sautéed in coconut sauce, served with pigeon peas rice, is a fine example of a traditional Dominican dish offered at La Yola, a marina-side, open-air restaurant under a giant thatched hut called a “palapa.” The perfectly cooked sweet pink shrimp are bathed in a slightly spicy, slightly briny coconut broth and served on a bed of sticky rice.

Service is attentive, yet measured with knowledgeable staff to guide you through the offerings. Remember to enjoy a cold Presidente, the fine Dominican lager that pairs well with the area’s hearty fare.

Save a visit to Bamboo for your last night in Punta Cana. The restaurant’s Mediterranean-Dominican creations are inspired, and the harborside setting is cozy and intimate. Diners may enjoy a playful amuse-bouche from the chef and then be tempted with the likes of mango gazpacho with salmon tataki and pineapple froth, mushroom risotto with Parmesan foam and Caribbean lobster, grilled or baked.

Be forewarned — visiting Punta Cana is not without one significant downside. The return flight home always comes faster than you wish. ☺

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