

# Casa Magnifica

Legendary resort-residential complex Casa de Campo celebrates its 50th birthday next year – but new facilities and suites give it a timeless appeal, finds **Samantha Mayling**

You'll be following in the footsteps of Hollywood A-listers", they said. It was more like following in their golf cart tracks, because this resort is like a large upmarket town – and scooting around in a buggy is the only way to explore (so don't forget your driving licence).

A nearby private airport and heliport cater to celebrity guests, including Kim Kardashian and Beyoncé. However, mere mortals can fly in with British Airways or Tui to Punta Cana airport, just 45 minutes away.

#### ZIPPING AROUND

All-inclusive accommodation in this gated community spans 247 hotel rooms, 50 private staffed villas and the new Premier Club's 58 luxury suites, all stocked with Nespresso machines and L'Occitane toiletries. Guests have the use of a golf buggy; from my Premier Junior Suite it took 20 minutes to reach the other side of the resort for the white sandy beach at Minitas, a busy

marina packed with yachts, and the Italianate village of Altos de Chavón. A handy map aids navigation and marks out 5km routes for walking or jogging.

#### SPORTING CHANCE

The resort is renowned for its three championship golf courses created by acclaimed designer Pete Dye. With seven holes hugging the Caribbean shore, the Teeth of the Dog course was named after the jagged rocks incorporated into the design.

The equestrian centre, meanwhile – described as "among the best in the Caribbean" – offers lessons in riding, jumping and even rodeo stunts. As a complete novice, I felt safe riding my horse, Mangolina, being gently led by José, who has taught at the resort for 37 years. Polo facilities include three playing fields and one practice field – and novices can even try their hand at donkey polo.

Sadly, time constraints meant I couldn't see the tennis centre, dubbed "the Wimbledon of the

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### THINGS TO DO AT CASA DE CAMPO

#### Spa and Wellness Centre

The 18,000sq-ft facility, which opened in June, features a sauna, steam room, cold-water pool, thermal loungers and an outdoor pool. There are also 12 treatment rooms, one of which is designed for VIPs and brides.

Treatments range from The Art of Self-Love (\$495 for 170 minutes) to sessions costing less than \$100. I opted for the 50-minute Signature Massage (\$185), which was a heavenly way to relax my muscles, before I chilled out on a lounge overlooking the lake and fountain with a herbal tea.

#### Altos de Chavón

This replica 16th-century Italian village is home to the Regional Archaeological Museum. The museum's 3,000 artefacts tell the story of the indigenous Taíno – it's fascinating to learn about their culture and how words such as 'hammock' and 'canoe' came into English from their Arawak language. Also in town, a Grecian-style 5,000-seat amphitheatre has hosted shows by Elton John, Duran Duran and Rod Stewart.

#### Catalina Island

Daily boat trips depart from the water sports centre for the 35-minute ride to Catalina Island, accompanied by merengue music (\$48 adults, \$30 under-12s). Snorkelling equipment is available to hire, while the island is home to a souvenir shop, craft stalls and people offering massages and hair braiding.

#### Spa and Wellness Centre



PICTURE: Shawn Talbot Photography

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The Teeth of the Dog golf course; The Premier Club lounge and lobby; Chilango restaurant

Caribbean", or try kayaking, fishing or paddleboarding – nor visit the nightclub, cinema or kids' clubs.

#### PAMPERING THE PALATE

With eight international restaurants to choose from, clients can expect an adventure for their taste buds at every meal.

For breakfast, most guests opted for the bountiful buffet at Lago, with tables overlooking the Teeth of the Dog. Other options include the Spa Café and à la carte offerings at La Cana.

At lunch, Chilango Mexican restaurant and food trucks on the beach were the order of the day.

I was spoilt for choice at dinner time, with options such as Causa (Peruvian, Chinese and Japanese fusion menus) and La Casita, which serves Spanish fare and seafood. Options beyond the

all-inclusive range include Minitas Beach Club, where the Dominican fried snapper was delicious.

At the Casa de Campo's new spa, I indulged in healthy chia seed pudding and avocado on toast. Irene Campana, the spa and wellness director, tells me it is "one of the best spas in the Caribbean". She adds: "Guests have been amazed by the service, treatments and variety. The only problem is the availability of appointments, as it's so popular."

The spa's previous clients have included LA Law star Blair Underwood, who brought several of his guests when he married at Casa de Campo in June.

"The weather is fabulous, the resort is tranquil, and it's big enough that it's not crowded – and the people are genuine, with a passion to serve," says Campana. **TW**

#### BOOK IT

**Azure Collection** offers seven nights' all-inclusive in a Premier Junior Suite from £3,195, including a 40% discount. The price includes BA flights and transfers. [azurecollection.com](http://azurecollection.com)

### CASA DE CAMPO SELLING TIPS

By Jason Kycek, senior vice-president of sales and marketing

- Learn about our many USPs through training and fam trips. About 10% of our guests come from the UK and we're investing in a five-year plan to increase that with improvements such as extra Premier Suites and pool areas for kids.
- Educate clients about the Dominican Republic. It's an amazing country with wonderful people, food, history and diversity – ideal for the luxury market.
- Our diversity of activities – from shooting to equestrian – plus world-class cuisine and 2,800 hectares to explore are the main draw. Guests enjoy the same facilities as our 2,400-plus homeowners.
- We've got some exciting events to mark our 50th anniversary next year, starting with a Frank Sinatra cover band and orchestra – as he was the first performer to sing here.