



Larry Olmsted, Contributor

I travel to learn, eat, golf, and ski, but mostly for travel's sake

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Ritz Carlton Brings A New Hotel Brand To The U.S.

Ritz-Carlton is one of the best-known luxury hospitality brands in the world, and has many loyal fans. But if there is one knock [the company](#) gets in deluxe travel circles, it is for being “too cookie cutter.”

Ritz-Carlton Reserve could change all that.

The concept for [the Reserve brand](#) is signature, one-of-a-kind boutique resorts around the world, each with a distinctive personality and sense of place. As the company explains it, “The Reserve is for travelers seeking to discover a singular location and peerless resort that, through its design and services, has a distinctive personality that blends together the culture, history and heritage of its setting. The Reserve brand extension will be distinguished from other award-winning resorts by offering guests’ exotic, hand-selected ‘hideaway’ destinations globally; a relaxed, casually elegant atmosphere; and an even greater level of individualized service through a higher staff to guest ratio.”



The first Reserve was opened in Phulay Bay, Thailand. The second was closer to home and is less than two months old: it opened in Puerto Rico on 12/12/12.

[Dorado Beach, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve](#) occupies about 50-acres within Dorado Beach, the 1,400 acre former Laurance Rockefeller estate, a property outside of San Juan that originally held one of his Rockresorts hotels, and more recently two now defunct



The Dorado Beach resort has three 18-hole golf courses. Photo: Ritz-Carlton

Hyatts. The new Reserve has just 100 guestrooms, all larger than normal, plus 14 one-bedroom suites sitting directly on the beach, and one villa. Typical features that are not typical at other hotels include floor-to-ceiling sliding doors that entirely disappear to create seamless ocean views, outdoor garden showers, individual infinity-edge pools, and luxurious cabanas.

The Su Casa hacienda was built almost a century ago for the plantation's first owner, Clara Livingston, and has been converted through a multimillion dollar restoration into a four-bedroom VIP villa overlooking the ocean. It features expansive gardens, a private pool and spacious cigar veranda.

The resort has a mile of beachfront, and connects to one of the property highlights, Laurance Rockefeller's unique, beloved and idyllic 11-mile nature trail. There is a water sports center, protected lagoons for swimming and nearby coral reefs for snorkeling. The larger [Dorado Beach resort property](#) includes a very high-end residential development, also by Ritz Carlton, and [three 18-hole golf courses](#). Until the rise of the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and specifically Dorado Beach was long THE golf epicenter of the Caribbean. There were originally four courses here, the pride and joy of which is still the East Course, designed by Robert Trent Jones, Sr. and recently remodeled by his son RTJ II. I have played Dorado East and it is a parkland classic with elegant bunkers transported to the Caribbean, a very pleasant round of golf.

Treehouse or massage room? Both! Photo: Ritz-Carlton

You cannot have a new luxury resort without a spa, so Ritz built Spa Botánico, and true to its name it is tucked away amid a five-acre botanical sanctuary. The spa combines a soothing natural setting with top-shelf facilities including warm and cool pools, waterfall showers, glass-walled treatment pavilions and open air tree-house platforms for massages among nature.



The culinary centerpiece is Mi Casa – “My House” – by acclaimed Latin superstar chef José Andrés. The James Beard award winner as Outstanding Chef, Andrés is from Spain and has had great success for the past two decades with everything from tapas and paella to tacos and Chinese noodles. Most of his restaurants are in Washington, DC, but I ate at his [Jaleo in the Cosmopolitan Las Vegas](#) and it was excellent. Ritz Carlton claims that Mi Casa is “his first restaurant outside the United States,” which might surprise the residents – all U.S. citizens – of Puerto Rico, or their (nonvoting) delegate to Congress, but hey, that’s splitting hairs. I think Puerto Rico is not outside the United States, but what’s

important is that I know Andrés' food is good. Here he showcases the island's diverse culinary landscape with a blend of Spanish and Puerto Rican flavors. Three other dining venues include Positivo Sand Bar, with al fresco cuisine and refreshing cocktails; Encanto Beach Club Bar & Grill, an open-air bistro with freshly grilled cuisine for lunch and Asian-style selections for dinner; and casual La Cocina Gourmet, for Puerto Rican coffees, homemade gelatos and lighter snacks.



Guest rooms feature disappearing doors to provide vast views. Photo: Ritz-Carlton

After much success with a similar program at its stellar Grand Cayman property, widely recognized as one of the very best Ritz Carlton resorts, the Reserve features Jean-Michel Cousteau's Ambassadors of the Environment program, designed for adults, families, and children to discover Puerto Rico's natural

wonders on land and sea, from coral reefs to wetlands. There is special emphasis on the island's traditional Taino culture, explored through snorkeling, kayaking, hiking and even an archaeological site within the vast resort property.

Herve Humler, President and COO for The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, L.L.C, explained: "The philosophy behind Dorado Beach, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve is to immerse guests into Puerto Rico's rich history and extraordinary landscape while providing an unparalleled luxury travel experience unlike any other. Reflective of Laurance Rockefeller's vision from more than 50 years ago of a natural sanctuary, the island is a combination of historical charm and metropolitan life blending serenity and a pristine backdrop – a perfect location for the Ritz-Carlton Reserve experience."

The resort has already gotten rave reviews from some of the most expert and respected travel agents I regularly work with, and if I visit I will be sure to report back first hand. Of course, a boutique resort with "an even greater level of individualized service," means even greater prices, or perhaps sticker shock: high season rates start at \$1,499 per night, "setting a new luxury benchmark for the Caribbean."

Future Ritz Carlton Reserves are planned for Los Cabos, Mexico; Muscat, Oman; Tamuda Bay, Morocco; and the Turks & Caicos.