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american spa


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SEASIDE SOPHISTICATION

SPA BOTÁNICO AT DORADO BEACH, A
RITZ-CARLTON RESERVE (PUERTO RICO)



PRISAGROUP®



Designed with a plantation-style aesthetic, the Shade House at Spa Botánico is an ideal place for guests to get a break from the hot Puerto Rican sun.

features

a closer look at some of the spas that are making news in the industry both here and abroad

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PRISAGROUP®

resplendent Return

A luxurious new retreat in Puerto Rico returns to its decadent roots and debuts a stunning new spa.

WRITTEN BY JULIE KELLER CALLAGHAN

Puerto Rico's picturesque Dorado Beach has a rather storied history. In 1905, the Livingston family built a 1,400-acre plantation with a private airstrip there, hosting the likes of pilot Amelia Earhart. Famed conservationist Laurance S. Rockefeller was later responsible for another incarnation, a luxury eco resort that opened in 1958 as a playground for celebrities, dignitaries, and well-heeled families. Over the years, various properties opened on Dorado Beach, but few would last. But December 2012 saw a revival of Rockefeller's famed opulence with the debut of Dorado Beach, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, the second in an exclusive portfolio of luxury properties worldwide (the other is in Krabi, Thailand). Situated amid the 1,400-acre former Rockefeller estate, the resort includes 100 guest rooms and 14 one-bedroom suites, a restored four-bedroom plantation hacienda, a restaurant by award-winning chef José Andrés, and **Spa Botánico**, a spectacular five-acre wellness oasis that is without compare in the Caribbean, according to spa director Jennifer Wayland-Smith. "The spa is designed to transport guests into a natural botanical world and deliver a spa experience that's truly one-of-a-kind," she says. "Spa Botánico is the heart of the resort experience and a haven within the resort."

Though most of the property features a mid-century modern design, the spa takes a hint from Puerto Rico's agrarian roots. "The buildings' architecture was inspired by sugar cane plantations and Spanish colonial motifs," says Wayland-Smith. "This design strategy was fertile ground for further inspiration for the interiors, exteriors, and treatments. Choices about interior and exterior finishes, landscape, and furnishings are rooted in the past." With history in mind, the spa features dark wood beams, columns, and trim; colorful, hand-toweled plaster that will gently patina over time; natural terra-cotta roofs; and coral stone walls and pavers, all of which reinforce the authentic and rustic sense of place. "We, along with ownership and the design team, decided the spa should be an aesthetic departure from the rest of the property," she adds. "We wanted the spa experience to be transformative."

Among the highlights of the spa are two treehouse treatment platforms where guests can experience a deep level of relaxation and unity with nature, as well as 10 glass-walled treatment pavilions that are accompanied by private outdoor gardens with showers and deep-soaking tubs. Each of the spa pavilions has a unique name, which corresponds with the artwork in each of the individual sitting areas.

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Each of the glass-walled treatment pavilions allows guests to enjoy views of the lush foliage on the 1,400-acre resort.



PRISAGROUP®



Whether enjoying an outdoor shower (top left) or relaxing in an infinity-edge pool (bottom left), guests are rejuvenated by sun and fresh air.



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The idea for the spa menu was taken from ancient Puerto Rican healers, the *ManoSantas*, as well as the island's naturally healing ingredients. "We don't offer anything that is not locally inspired," says Wayland-Smith. "Puerto Rico is rich with tradition, folklore, and actual people who have practiced and still practice native traditions. We drew upon these practices and people. We are also blessed with a place that is home to so many native species of plants. Remember that the Caribbean flourished because of the spices, fruits, and vegetables that were, and still are, seen as exotic to most of the rest of the world."

Perhaps the ultimate example of indigenous inspiration on the menu are the *ManoSantas* Infusions & Massage and the Apothecary Ritual, in which special infusions are created by the spa's

"Spa Botánico is the heart of the resort experience and a haven within the resort."

own trained *ManoSantas*. The Body Soak, Herbal Compress and Massage (\$300, 90 minutes; \$400, 2 hours) experiences involve herbal blends to encourage Vitality (eucalyptus, ginger, and lemongrass), Serenity (lavender, orange, and sweet lime leaf), Purity (sage, salts, and sour orange), or Muscle Ease (amphor, arnica, and cinnamon). For a more intensive experience, the *ManoSantas* Apothecary Ritual (\$650, 3 hours) involves a consultation during which the *ManoSantas* creates a custom blend of dried and fresh botanicals and a custom massage oil, which are used in a personalized spa experience.

Like at most spas, massage reigns supreme as the most popular offering. However, Spa Botánico's unique setting makes even a traditional massage something guests won't soon forget. "We do have some very special spaces where we provide massage, such as the treehouses, which have been extremely popular," says

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CLOCKWISE: The treehouse treatment pavilions and the outdoor soaking tub are among the amenities that guests are introduced to when they arrive at the resort.



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Wayland-Smith. "While having a massage there, you can hear the ocean waves during the day and the coqui frogs in the evening. It is quite special."

Also memorable is the spa's mostly alfresco setting, which can provide some unique challenges to the staff of 27 experienced practitioners. "All of the team members are working outdoors for the majority of their day, so we have to manage what Mother Nature provides us—sun and rain and everything in between," says Wayland-Smith. "Umbrellas are always on-hand for the occasional rain shower, but I must say that most of the time, we enjoy the sunshine, blue skies, and openness of the spa."

Since the spa debuted amid the resort's high season, Wayland-Smith says she and her team have often seen it filled to capacity from morning to night with Reserve guests. "We have found that there has been very little challenge with attracting guests to the property and the spa," she says. "All of our holidays have been busy so far, and we expect this to continue as the good word spreads within the luxury travel market." With business already booming, marketing aggressively to guests, locals, and other travelers to the island has not yet been a huge priority, though that may change as they approach the traditionally slower summer season. But no matter the time of year, she anticipates Spa Botánico will continue to grow as a must-visit destination, adding, "We truly believe guests will come to visit Dorado Beach for Spa Botánico on its own, as it ranks among the finest and most exclusive in the world." ■

SPA BOTÁNICO AT DORADO BEACH, A RITZ-CARLTON RESERVE (Puerto Rico)

OWNERS: Caribbean Property Group and the PRISA Group

SPA DIRECTOR: Jennifer Wayland-Smith

OPENED: December 2012

CLIENT BASE

65% female, 35% male

SPACE

5 acres; 10 treatment rooms, 2 treehouse massage platforms

COST OF SPA

\$20 million

OFFERINGS

aromatherapy, body treatments, couples' treatments, energy work, facials, fitness, hair and scalp treatments, hand and foot treatments, hydrotherapy, LED therapy, makeup application, massage, nailcare, nutrition consultation, outdoor treatments, prenatal services, salon services, waxing, yoga

SIGNATURE SPA SERVICE

ManoSantas Body Soak, Herbal Compress and Massage (\$300, 90 minutes; \$400, 2 hours)

MOST EXPENSIVE OFFERING

Apothecary Play (\$950, 3 hours), a custom apothecary creation, exfoliation and mud application, a garden steam, a couple's bath, and massage for two

PRODUCT LINES

Ila, La Bella Donna, Natura Bissé, René Furterer, Spa Botánico signature line, Thaiyurveda

EQUIPMENT

Ageless Esthetics, Ipanema, Living Earth Crafts, Madison Collection, TechnoGym, SpaSoft

ARCHITECT

SB Architects (Miami)

INTERIOR DESIGNER

Bill Bensley, Bensley Design Studios (Bangkok, Thailand)

SPA CONSULTANT

Tracy Lee, TLee Spas (Mill Valley, CA)