

Samana Bali Beds
Credit: Viva Wyndham Resorts

Make a DATE in the Dominican Republic

By Melanie Reffes

colorful array of painted coconut shells, horseback riding and family-style buffet.
www.gosamana.com

SWEET SUITES

Punta Cana leads the accommodations sector with 37,000 rooms, followed by Puerto Plata and Santo Domingo. By 2019, it is expected 18,000 rooms will open including 55 new hotels with a combined price tag of \$2 billion US dollars. "We've seen a rapid growth in US hotel chains coming to our country," said Radhames Martinez Aponte, Vice Minister of Tourism and President of DATE. Hotels set to open this year include 40 -story **Hard Rock Hotel** and 227-room **Real InterContinental** in Santo Domingo and the **Nickelodeon** in Punta Cana.

Philadelphia-based **AMResorts**, part of the Apple Leisure Group, opened **Sunscape Puerto Plata**, the brand's first resort in the DR. On the northern coast, the 585-room hotel is family-friendly with the trademarked 'Unlimited-Fun' concept. "Puerto Plata is a perfect fit for the Sunscape Resorts & Spas portfolio. Its rich beauty, history and culture give families the opportunity to explore, relax and enjoy an unforgettable vacation," said Gonzalo del Peón, President of AMResorts. For a higher level of service, clients with a bigger budget can upgrade to the Sun Club which includes sips and snacks in the private lounge, clubs for kids and teens, nine restaurants and seven bars. "Expanding the Sunscape brand to the Dominican Republic offers a budget-friendly alternative in a prime destination that maximizes value for travelers," said Alex Zozaya, CEO Apple Leisure Group. **Sunscape Puerto Plata** faces the Atlantic Ocean and is surrounded by an 18-hole Robert Trent Jones-designed golf course.
www.suncaperesorts.com.

AMResorts in the DR include upscale **Zoétry Wellness & Spa Resorts**, adults-only **Secrets Resorts**, family-friendly **Dreams** and **Now Resorts**.

The largest trade show in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, **DATE (Dominican Annual Tourism Exchange)** was held this year in Punta Cana. Celebrating the 60th anniversary of the **Meliá Hotel** chain with properties in the DR including the host resort **Paradisus Palma Real**, the convention center was action-central for buyers and sellers. "It is more than an honor for us to welcome top tour operators and industry marketers worldwide," said Conrad Bergwerf, General Director of Paradisus Resorts.

In its 17th year and organized by the **National Hotel & Tourism Association (ASONAHORES)**, buyers from around the world mingle with dozens of suppliers from resorts and hotels to airlines, tour operators and wedding planners. "Dominican Republic is the fastest growing destination in the Caribbean with a 5.8 percent growth rate over the last five years, compared to the Caribbean's rate of 3.7 percent," said Radhames Martinez Aponte, Vice Minister of Tourism and President of DATE. "We will welcome 6 million visitors this year which includes 2 million from the United States, compared to 4.8 million last year."
www.drdate.net

Hotel occupancy is at a record 79%; the highest in the Caribbean. "While sun and beach remain the country's most sought attractions, we continue our work in expanding the tourism marketplace," said Francisco Javier Garcia, Tourism Minister. "Our offerings range from adventurous Puerto Plata, lush Samaná and sunny Punta Cana, to luxe La Romana and historic Santo Domingo."
www.GoDominicanRepublic.com.

HOST WITH THE MOST

According to the 2016 TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice ratings, Punta Cana is the #1 destination in the Caribbean. "We are thrilled to receive this recognition indicating the efforts we have put into the Punta Cana region are so highly rated by tourists," said Magaly Toribio, Marketing Advisor for the Ministry of Tourism. "We have worked to make Punta Cana an accessible destination attractive to a wide variety of travelers and are glad to know that its offerings are so deeply enjoyed by those that visit."

Hotels in Punta Cana awarded the TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice rating include the **Iberostar Grand Hotel Bavaro**, **The Reserve at Paradisus Punta Cana**, **The Reserve at Paradisus Palma Real**, **AI Sol Tiara Cap Cana**, **Eden Roc at Cap Cana**, **Barcelo Bavaro Palace Deluxe**, **Iberostar Bavaro Suites**, **Club Med Punta Cana** and **NH Punta Cana**.

SEE SAMANA

For the discerning traveler, Samaná Peninsula is one of the least explored regions of the country. With an international airport, Samana is popular with those who like quiet beaches, unspoiled landscape and hotels not yet overrun by tourists. With a room count of 3,650, the newest is 144-room **V Samaná**; adults-only upscale brand in the Viva Wyndham Resorts portfolio. Close to the town of Las Terrenas with its charming shops, cafes and beachfront restaurants, the seaside resort offers four restaurants, 24-hour room service and a spa.
www.vcollectionresorts.com

For a day away from the resort, intrepid travelers enjoy the waterfalls, caves, whale watching and mom and pop restaurants like Manzana with its

The largest resort in the country, 1,800-room **Hard Rock Hotel** in Punta Cana introduced Colin Cowie Wedding Collections. "We are thrilled to continue elevating the destination wedding experience in a way the industry has never seen before," said Frank Maduro, Vice President of Marketing. "Through the partnership with Colin Cowie, couples are offered the ultimate all-inclusive destination wedding and a chance

66% of the 5.6 million visitors so far this year, followed by Puerto Plata's Gregorio Luperón International Airport (POP) at 17 percent and La Romana International Airport (LRM) at 7 percent.

The largest airline in the DR, Jet Blue is increasing service to Santiago, Santo Domingo, Punta Cana, Puerto Plata and La Romana. A second daily flight from New York (JFK) to Puerto Plata is added for sum-

tions to leverage new opportunities in the region." Along with two new hotels in the capital city, Delta Vacations also added **Bahia Principe Samana** and **Don Pablo** in Samana. "This year we will add ten more hotels in Punta Cana, and that's just one corner of the country where Delta Vacations is growing," added Karen Kammer. In Puerto Plata, Delta Vacations and its hotel partners AMResorts, Iberostar Hotels and RIU Hotels offer all-inclusive choices at **Iberostar Costa Dorada**, Premium; **Riu Bachata**, **Riu Merengue** and **Sunscape**. www.delta.com

At the new Amber Cove port in Puerto Plata, cruise arrivals spiked by 64 percent, coming in at 550,000 visitors. Since Amber Cove's inauguration, 5,000 cruise visitors arrive weekly with plans underway to expand in December with eleven new cruise ships set to drop anchor. On land, the new fast highway between Punta Cana and Santo Domingo, Puerto Plata, Samaná and La Romana reduces travel times for those looking to explore beyond the resort strip in Punta Cana. www.GoDominicanRepublic.com



Hard Rock Hotel Eden Pool at night
Credit: All Inclusive Collection

to connect with their loved ones through a tailored and intimate experience." Starting at \$2,500, wedding packages are customized for each couple and organized by the hotels wedding planning team. www.hrhallinclusive.com

Five minutes from the La Romana International Airport on the southeast coast, **Casa de Campo**, member of The Leading Hotels of the World, is the holy grail of high living. Appealing to the well-heeled and the high-heeled, the tony retreat offers a trio of fine golf courses (Teeth of the Dog, Dye Fore and Links), 5,000-seat Grecian-style amphitheater inaugurated by Frank Sinatra in 1982 and welcome bottle of Moët Chandon. The two-story villa La Laguna del Mar is the crown jewel boasting six bedrooms with Bali-inspired décor, while the five-bedroom Villa Cielo Azul comes with uninterrupted views of the Caribbean Sea and the Teeth of the Dog course. www.casadecampo.com.do

GETTING THERE

Beginning in May 2017, US Customs and Border Protection will add pre-clearance operations in Punta Cana, the fourth in the Caribbean after Bermuda, The Bahamas (Nassau and Freeport) and Aruba. Punta Cana International Airport (PUJ) welcomed

mer travel. "We are committed to the Caribbean and will continue to add flights to the various airports in the country," said Claudia Gonzalez, Manager of Sales and Marketing, Latin America and Caribbean. www.JetBlue.com

Delta Vacations added **Sheraton Santo Domingo** and **JW Marriott** to Delta Vacation packages. "Room nights are up in Santo Domingo, Samana, La Romana and Puerto Plata which is Delta Vacations' newest Dominican destination," said Karen Kammer, Director of Product Development. "This unprecedented growth has positioned Delta Vacations

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