

Dominican Republic: Golf Paradise of the Caribbean

DESTINATIONS

Dave Weretka with Neal Kotlerek

Way back in 1969—at just about the same time when man was about ready to step out onto the moon’s surface—golf architect Pete Dye took on a challenge that was nearly as daunting as the one facing Neil Armstrong and his colleagues.

According to legend, Dye was rumbling down a dirt road alongside the pristine shoreline of the Dominican Republic some 36 years ago in search of inspiration. He found it after passing through the town of La Romana on the southeast side of the island. The designer got out of his vehicle and beheld “the most beautiful seaside location for a golf course” he’d ever come across. Dye had no idea at the time that his discovery would evolve into a lifelong commitment to this Caribbean country and its people.

In his autobiography *Bury Me in a Pot Bunker*, Dye recalls how sugar magnate Alvaro Carta offered to bankroll the designer’s vision of a course winding along the coastline as the centerpiece of a lavish resort. The parcel of land chosen for the layout extended down from the sea upwards along coral cliffs. After plotting the layout hole by hole by hole, Dye became convinced that “something extraordinary was possible.”

And indeed, just about everything about this project was at least a couple notches above ordinary. While the location was spectacular, it was covered with thick underbrush, stubby tropical trees, and cacti. In 18 months, Dye and his construction crew oversaw a staff of 300 Dominicans who molded the course essentially by hand. They cleared the underbrush with machetes and then used sledgehammers, pickaxes, and chisels to crack the bare coral rock and limestone that covered the area. Noting how sharp the coral became when shattered, the workers referred to the remnants as “dientes del perro.” The phrase was embraced and became the name of the finished product: the “Teeth of the Dog.”

Finished in the fall of 1971, the 6,888-yard golf course has remained a fixture on the world’s top 50 golf courses to this day. Over the years, the course was complemented by 45 other holes all designed by Dye to create a golfer’s paradise known as Casa de Campo resort. The sprawling 7,000-acre property features a luxury hotel, a beach, indoor and



outdoor restaurants, an equestrian center, a spa, a shooting range and many other amenities. But the centerpiece of the complex remains golf. And the centerpiece of the centerpiece remains Pete Dye’s original masterpiece.

“The Teeth of the Dog is a course you can play day after day and never tire of it,” says Gilles Gagnon, Director of Golf Operations at the property. “Seven holes play along the Caribbean Sea and supports Doak’s contention about the quality of the par 3s. “You won’t find a better grouping of one-shooters anywhere. They range from a pitching wedge on one hole to perhaps a driver on No. 16, depending upon the wind direction.”

As one of the designer’s earlier creations, it is interesting to note that his signature “Dye-abolical” contoured putting surfaces are missing in action. While well-guarded and frequently elevated, the greens are relatively flat and set in an angular fashion. The third hole is a mid-range par 5 that tempts long hitters to attempt to reach the green in two strokes. We found the hard way that it is better to lay up on the second shot to set up a short-iron approach shot to this birthday-cake green.

The course’s signature hole is the par-3 No. 5. From a tee box parallel to the coastline, the golfer is asked to weave a short-iron over to a

green protected by bunkers and the deep blue sea. One can’t help but marvel at the technical elements involved in constructing this hole, as the putting surface rises above the waves by only a few feet. Once you’ve putted out on the hole, take a minute to enjoy the view.

Highlighting the back nine are Nos. 15 through 17 which are all located on the sea. The par-4 15th is a dogleg right that ends at a green perched precariously above the sea. The 194-yard No. 16 is just as treacherous, as its kidney-shaped green looks downright tiny next to the blue waters protecting its right flank.

While one might be tempted to play Teeth of the Dog over and over again, the resort’s



other Dye courses serve us memorable challenges and scenery in the own right. The Dye Fore Course is perched 300 feet atop the cliffs overlooking the Chavon River. The course previously known as the Dye Fore North Nine has been melded together with the new Dye Fore Lakes to create a dynamic 18-hole layout. Although 7,630 yards from the championship tees, the course plays a bit shorter as expansive fairways and greens allow for aggressive attacks off the tees and to the greens.

The Marina Nine is windswept and cascades down toward the Casa de Campo port. Rolling fairways and sea breezes challenge shot selection on every hole.

An outstanding view of the Altos de Chavon—the resort’s authentic 16th century Mediterranean village—is served up on several holes across the course.

The 6,461-yard Links Course is a full 18-hole layout that runs through the interior of the property. Even so, great views of the sea can be found across the course’s rolling terrain. Sand bunkers abound across the course and

tall bahia and guinea grass make the rough an additional hazard.

Away from Dye’s handiwork, guests at Casa de Campo can enjoy world-class dining, shopping, entertainment, and both hotel and villa accommodations. Additional sport offerings include 13 tennis courts, a 245-acre shooting facility, three polo fields, a yacht club, a sailing school, deep-sea and fresh-water fishing, kayaking, and snorkeling at the resort’s private beach. Spa services include massages, reflexology, body treatments, aromatherapy, steam baths, and plunge pools.

Thirteen restaurants across the complex serve up everything from local cuisine to steaks, chops, pizza, and fine dining.

Barcelo Bavaro Beach Resort

While the Dominican Republic has always been an outstanding vacation destination, the popularity of Teeth of the Dog has inevitably lured other golf developers to the island. Indeed, Pete Dye’s son P.B. Dye enjoys his own legacy on the island, starting with his 18-hole

course at this luxury property situated on one of the world’s most spectacular beaches. Some guests are lured to the sprawling Punta Cana property for the boating, others for the casino, others for the luxurious U-Spa, and still others for the 11 world-class restaurants. Golfers on the elegant Lakes Course are treated to a refreshing journey through lush mangroves and around (and sometimes across) 25 inland lakes. Designer Dye pays just homage to his father by lacing the routing with railroad ties in unexpected places. Barcelo Bavaro Beach Resort is a member of a large family of well-regarded Barcelo Resorts. Stay and play packages for golfers include one free green fee per person every other night. View the resort’s website for more details: www.barcelo.com.

Puntacana Resort & Club

Reviewers of the two golf courses at this spectacular 15,000-acre development next to Punta Cana’s airport fumble over each other extolling the virtues of the property.

The Corales Course was built by Tom Fazio and opened in 2010. The layout’s setting is “surreal,” according to the World Golf website. “Sparkling waters with waves crashing against the rocks at such force that ocean spray rises high into the air,” it continues. In truth, the course’s oceanfront cliffs, alone, make any 18-hole round here a lifetime memory. At least seven holes feature the ocean in play with the final three, known collectively as “The Devil’s Elbow” (El Codo Del Diablo) highlighted by elevation changes and finicky Caribbean winds.

La Cana is a 27-hole hole course designed by the aforementioned P.B. Dye and features 14 holes with amazing ocean views.

Puntacana Resort & Club has received AAA’s Five Star Diamond Award and is widely recognized among the top 25 luxury resorts in the Caribbean. Elegant accommodations are complemented by the Six Senses Spa, the Oscar de la Renta Tennis Center, and a wide range of other amenities including an aquatic center and an interactive museum.

Punta Espada

Considered by some to rival Casa De Campo’s Teeth of the Dog as the best course in the Caribbean, Punta Espada Golf Club was designed by Jack Nicklaus and features eight holes along and over the sea. The course hosted the inaugural Cap Cana Championship Champions Tour event in 2008. Located on a dazzling 30,000-acre resort and residential development called Cap Cana, the 7,396-yard course features elevated tees to shorten holes along with multiple tee positions to accommodate all handicap levels. The 611-yard second hole heads toward the ocean off the tee and winds up on a green hovering above an inlet pool. A par here is reason for celebration 16 holes later.

The unique No. 10 plays to an island green surrounded not by water but by sand. While you won’t lose a penalty stroke immediately if your approach shot finds the hazard, don’t be surprised if it takes you two to extract yourself from this devious sand bunker.

Accommodations at the resort vary from private luxury villas to junior and family suites at the boutique hotel Eden Roc. Spa services, dining experiences and boating on the Caribbean are available on the property.

Dominican Republic Fact Sheet

Airports: Three international airports service the island, including Casa de Campo/La Romana International (LRM) just minutes from the resort. Santo Domingo Airport is located 70 minutes from La Romana.

Entry: A passport is required to enter the country.

Weather: Daytime temperatures are in the 80s year round. Night time temperatures vary from the mid-60s during the winter months to the low 70s in summertime.

Language: Spanish is the island’s official language but English is spoken widely at most tourist areas and on all resort properties.

For more information: puntacana.com and puntaespadagolf.com.

