

# New La Concha combines rich history and promise of rebirth

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By Gay Nagle Myers

**I**t's the newest upscale hotel in San Juan, but its beginnings date to 1958, when the tropical modernism design movement was in its infancy. Even 50 years ago, La Concha boasted an innovative look that emphasized the property's tropical location and cultural richness.

Fans of that architectural style will recognize it in the new 248-room La Concha Renaissance, which had a soft opening in December on the site of the original La Concha hotel, in San Juan's Condado section, following a \$220 million restoration and renovation project.

The architects retained the landmark shell-shaped form above the main restaurant from which the hotel took its name and reinforced the cement structure with glass panes to reflect the sea and the curving concave effect of the shell's design.

Traditional characteristics of Puerto Rico's residential architecture were included, such as the large, open courtyard called El Batey (the Taino Indian phrase for an open recreational area), which contains a multilevel infinity pool and Jacuzzis, casual seating and a tapas restaurant called Solera.

Also in the tradition of many Puerto Rican homes, the top floor of La Concha is designed as a lookout with views of the ocean on one side and the city on the other.

The modernist theme predominates in the use of vibrant accents in the public areas and guest rooms, a mix of stainless steel and African mahogany in the furnishings, and the placement of big windows that allow light and ocean views.

"The rebirth of La Concha is important for us and for Puerto Rico's history. The reappearance of La Concha gives Puerto Rico the chance to experience a new resort as well as the first Renaissance property on the island," said Jose Suarez, vice president and general director of International Hospitality Enterprises, developers and operators of the Condado Duo (La Concha Renaissance and the Condado Vanderbilt next door).

IHE also operates the Isla Verde Courtyard by Marriott, the Hotel Pierre and El Convento, all in San Juan.

The January opening kick-started a strong winter season for the property, which ran occupancies in the 90% area in February, followed by solid bookings through March, according to Luis Mendez, director of sales and marketing. Groups, meetings and weddings funneled business to the property this winter, as well.

Family bookings dominated in March, coinciding with the Easter holiday period.

Although rates initially were discounted to jump-start the soft opening, the off-season rate change takes effect with bookings after April 27, when the rack rate for a deluxe oceanfront room drops from \$349 per night, double, to \$239. Packages are available, as well.

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