

TravelAgent CENTRAL

RENAISSANCE AT TWO SAN JUAN RESORTS

Ritz-Carlton upgrades, La Concha reopens

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The grand lobby lounge of the Ritz-Carlton, San Juan boasts floor-to-ceiling windows, letting in plenty of natural light

AT THE OTHER END OF SAN JUAN, both geographically and style-wise, from The Cervantes is **The Ritz-Carlton, San Juan**, where big and small changes are in the works.

When the beachfront hotel opened in Isla Verde a decade ago, only 21 of its 416 rooms had balconies. Now, as a result of frequent guest suggestions, 40 more balconies are being added at a cost of \$1 million. Twenty of the new balconies will be available for the current winter season, and the other 20 will be added for the following year. The hotel will add more if demand warrants another expansion.

The contemporary-style balconies, designed by a Puerto Rican architectural/engineering firm, are 15 feet long and 3½ feet wide, with terra cotta tile floors and a wrought-iron frame. Large enough for two chairs and a small table, they overlook the hotel's beautiful gardens and the ocean beyond. The room's air-conditioning automatically shuts off when the balcony door is opened. Rates are approximately \$110 higher per night for rooms with balconies.

An even more ambitious project at the Ritz-Carlton is the construction of a 20,000-square-foot spa, almost double the size of the present one. The new facility will have 16 treatment rooms, including some for couples, and a fitness center. Construction is scheduled to begin in January, and the spa—to be built over the hotel's casino—is expected to be completed for next winter season. The present spa and fitness center will continue to operate until the new facility is ready. Several ideas are being considered to convert the building housing the existing spa, but none have been finalized.



A guest room at La Concha

Less than a year ago, French chef Laurent Tourondel opened his first BLT restaurant (BLT stands for Bistro Laurent Tourondel) in the Caribbean, BLT Steak at the Ritz-Carlton. Open for dinner only, it replaced the Prime restaurant. It has a raw bar and a selection of seafood entrees, but the specialty is steak, particularly Kobe beef and Wagyu skirt (the American version). There is also a selection of 15 scrumptious desserts and a small children's menu.

Over the last several years, all of the Ritz-Carlton's guest rooms and suites have been refurbished with contemporary decor, Internet access, flat-screen TVs and Bulgari toiletries. Also, a new, almost revolutionary (for Ritz-Carlton) amenity—a coffeemaker—has been added. But in true Ritz-Carlton style, it's no ordinary coffeepot. Rather, a state-of-the-art coffeemaker and a sleek pot for brewing tea are encased in a fine mahogany box, reminiscent of a colonial campaign chest. It has compartments for china cups and stirrers, as well as coffee pods (regular and decaf), a selection of teas, small containers of real cream and packets of sugar. Like the balconies, this new in-room amenity is the result of guest suggestions.

For inquiries and reservations at the Ritz-Carlton, San Juan (www.ritzcarlton.com), call 787-253-1700 or 800-241-3000.

Condado Stages Comeback

Midway between Old San Juan and Isla Verde is Condado, San Juan's prime resort area. After almost a decade of decline, it is making a comeback thanks to major hotel renovations, the addition of high-end boutiques—Ferragamo, Chanel, Gucci, among others—and most importantly, the rebirth of La Concha after a 10-year closure. The resort was set to reopen December 8, marking 49 years to the day of the hotel's original opening, when it was hailed as a masterpiece of the "Tropical Modernism" architectural movement in the Caribbean.

La Concha (www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/sjubr-la-concha-a-renaissance-resort), which will be the first property in Puerto Rico to be marketed under Marriott's Renaissance brand, is only the first phase of a huge project that will see the addition of a condo-hotel tower on La Concha's east flank and the restoration of the Vanderbilt mansion as the centerpiece of another hotel and condo-hotel complex to the east, opening in 2009.

The entire project is headed by Hugh Andrews, president of International Hospitality Enterprises, who was responsible for the rebirth of El San Juan Hotel, and thus the Isla Verde district, as well as for El Conquistador, which sparked development of the Fajardo area. The interior designer for these hotels, Jorge Rossello, has put his genius to work in the makeover of La Concha, turning it into an oasis of cool.

Sure to become the epitome of urban seaside chic for hotel guests, day visitors and Condado residents, La Concha's elegant open-air plaza has cascading waters, fountains and pools to one side of the expansive, open lobby. The 248 spacious, ultramodern guest rooms, all with spectacular ocean views, have iPod/MP3-player-compatible alarm clocks, flat-screen LCD TVs, digital on-demand entertainment and high-speed Internet access, to name a few of the upscale amenities.

The resort's five restaurants include Perla, the signature seafood restaurant of well-known chef Dayne Smith, resting under La Concha's trademark beachside shell dome; another with Pacific Rim cuisine and prime meat; a pool grill by day and tapas bar by night; a deli; and a coffee shop. The seaside Casino del Mar will open in summer 2008.

Agents with VIP clients should contact José M. Suárez, vice president and managing director (jsuarez@laconcharesort.com), 787-721-7500), or Luis A. Méndez, director of sales and marketing (lmendez@laconcharesort.com).

For information and reservations, call 877-524-7778 or 787-721-8500. The sales phone number for La Concha is 787-721-7500.