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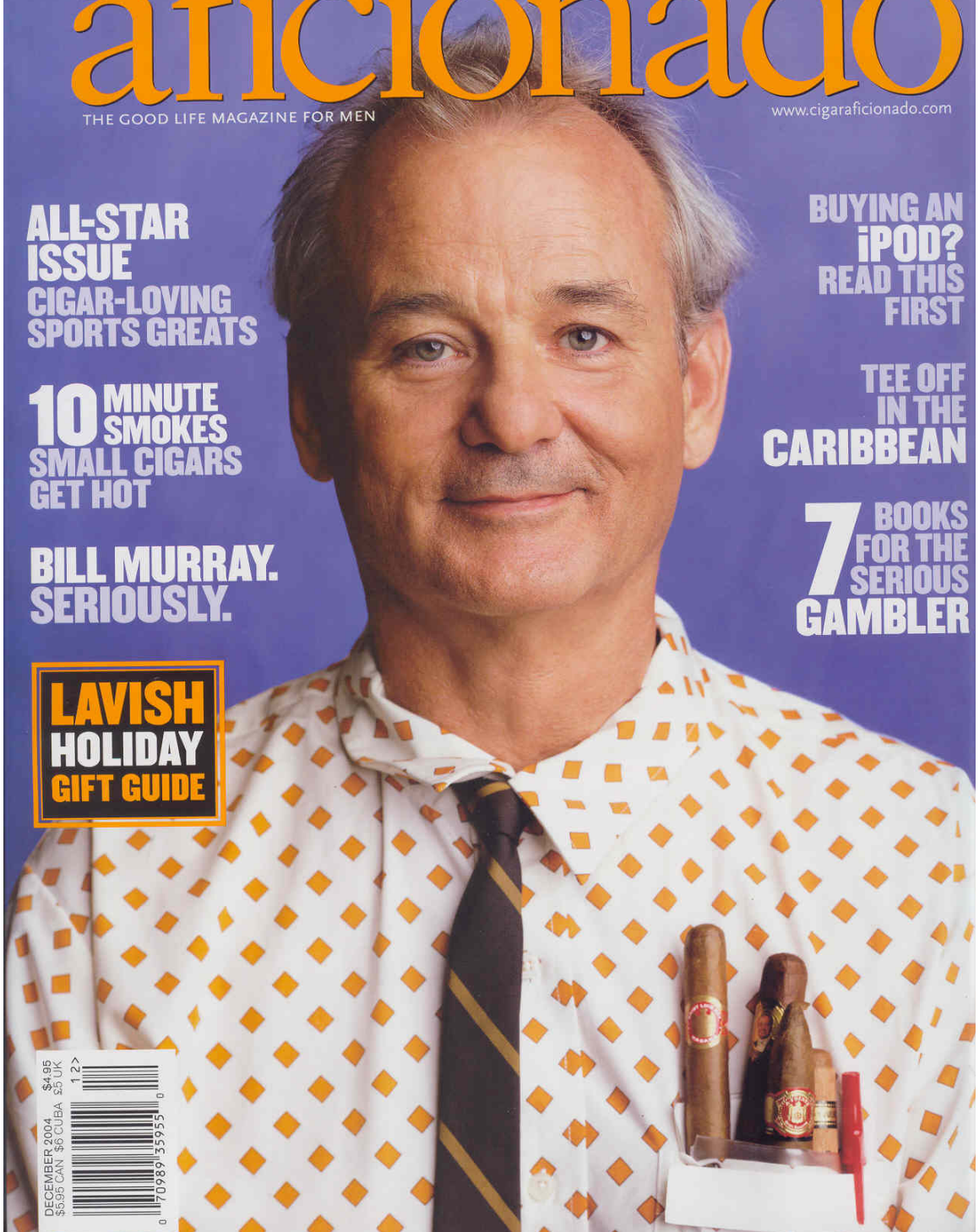
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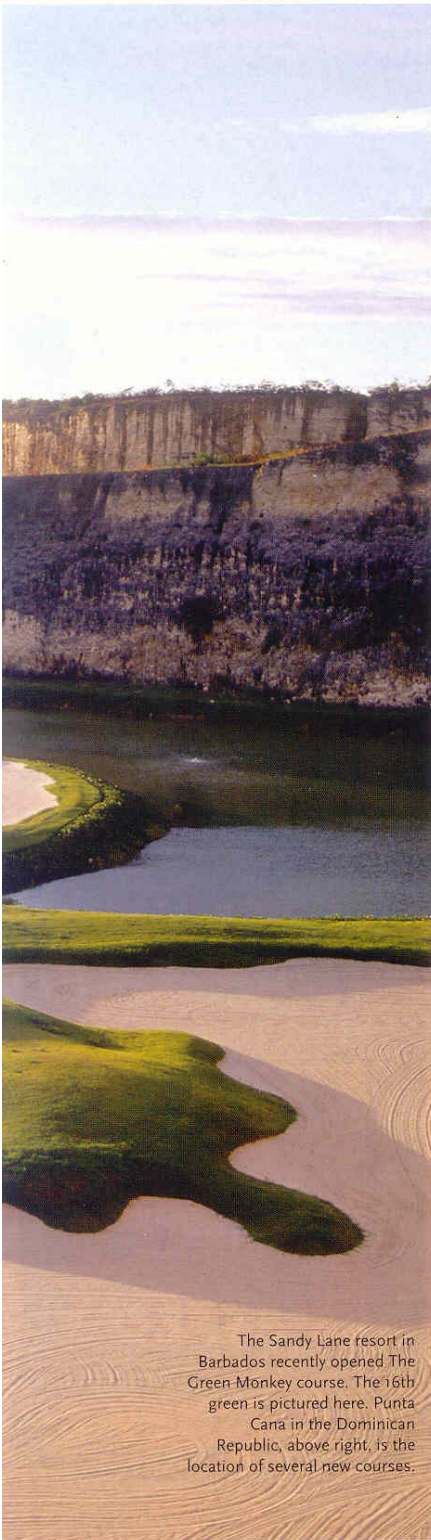
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Caribbean Greens





The Sandy Lane resort in Barbados recently opened The Green-Monkey course. The 16th green is pictured here. Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic, above right, is the location of several new courses.



Resorts From Barbados to the Dominican Republic Are Building Stunning Golf Courses to Round Out That Perfect Vacation

BY JEFF WILLIAMS

From a window seat at 10,000 feet, the islands of the Caribbean appear as jewels afloat on an aquamarine sea. The sugary sand beaches, the verdant landscape, the mysterious mountains and the clear blue-green waters are all the things you expect of the Caribbean, and, indeed, of paradise.

Now, golf has begun to join the roster of pleasures to be found throughout this tropical paradise. Where once only a few of the region's resorts offered golf, and fewer still offered high-quality golf, the bird's-eye view tells you that the green fingers of the game are wrapping themselves around coastlines, spreading through old sugar-cane fields and caressing the sides of mountains. Barbados, the Bahamas, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica have seen an explosion of dramatically beautiful new courses.

Jorge L. Diaz shows off his piece of paradise from a more intimate level, hovering at around 500 feet. He lifts his A-Star helicopter from the newly paved parking lot of the Coco Beach Golf & Country Club in Puerto Rico, and swoops above the facility's 36 holes. Diaz is executive vice president of a large family construction company in Puerto Rico that owns a large plot of northeastern coastal land, about 40 minutes from San Juan. In his helicopter, Diaz is tour guide and pilot, and as the craft flies gracefully above his land, he speaks with obvious passion. "We have had this land in our family for 43 years and we are finally doing something that I feel makes us very proud," says Diaz. "We are doing something here that is very good for Puerto Rico."

What Diaz and his company felt was needed was another golf facility for Puerto Rico, an island already blessed with many fine golf venues. But Diaz's realization has spread all across the Caribbean. In the last 10 years, particularly the last five, golf courses have been popping up across the islands, growing faster than the banana trees and the sugar-cane fields they are replacing.

Tom Fazio has built 36 holes at Sandy Lane in Barbados. Pete Dye has added a new course, known as Dye Fore, to his beloved Casa de Campo resort in the Dominican Republic, and his son P. B. has designed the course at the Punta Cana Resort and Club. Robert von Hagge has built the White

Witch Golf Club in Jamaica and overhauled the Rose Hall course nearby, known now as Cinnamon Hill. Greg Norman constructed the River Course at the Westin Rio Mar in Puerto Rico and the Emerald Bay course on the Exuma islands in the Bahamas. Tom Weiskopf oversaw the Ocean Club course on Paradise Island in the Bahamas. Jack Nicklaus has several projects under way in the Dominican Republic, St. Lucia, Tortola and Anguilla. Chi Chi Rodriguez, the greatest player in the history of Caribbean golf, has built a course on his home island of Puerto Rico.

Barbados

Breaking through the clouds on the approach to Grantley International Airport in Bridgetown, the coastline of Barbados and its roster of excellent courses beckon. There's the Royal Westmoreland course constructed in the mid-'90s by Robert Trent Jones Jr. There's the recently renovated Barbados Golf Club, a public course. But the new gems are spectacular courses at the Sandy Lane Resort, Barbados' most elegant and pricey piece of paradise. Sandy Lane has Fazio's Country Club course and the newly opened Green Monkey. It also kept nine holes of its original course that plays through the estate. This is a big-time investment, and as you would expect, it has been rendered beautifully by Fazio, with a stunning modern cut-limestone and marble clubhouse at its heart.

While The Country Club and The Green Monkey have different playing characteristics, the adjacent 18-hole courses do share exceptional views of both the Caribbean and Bajan green monkeys. You can occasionally find yourself with a gallery of Barbados' most famous primate. The island has between 5,000 and 7,000 of these monkeys, originally brought to Barbados from West Africa about 350 years ago. A gorge that runs through The Green Monkey course acts as a highway for these playful creatures. On any early morning or late afternoon, you're likely to find a dozen of them frolicking in the trees along the fairways.

The Green Monkey is the more dramatic of the two courses, playing around and into a limestone quarry. Fazio did some quarrying work of his own to bring the limestone into view and into play on



Tom Fazio designed the Country Club course in Barbados and used the island's large stones to build walls around some of the greens.

The most challenging back tee is on the 17th, a par 4 that plays a modest 388 yards from the blue tees. Walking off the 16th green, the blues are immediately obvious. But your scorecard tells you that from the back tee the hole is 523 yards—as a par 4! Where could that tee be? Your well-trained Bajan caddie will then point out that it sits across the reservoir at the base of the enormous quarry wall, nearly 150 yards in back of the blue tee. Up for it? If you play 17 at 523 yards, the shortest of the three par 4s on the back nine is the 472-yard 18th hole.

"I remember when we opened that tee on 17 I had to give it a go," says Michael Davern, a fine Irish lad from Tipperary who's the director of golf for Sandy Lane. "There was a lot of wind swirling around down here. I couldn't carry the reservoir. I finally managed to hit one at the front tee boxes. You better be pretty strong if you are going to play that hole back there."

If you decide to play from all the back tees, be prepared for a rigorous 7,389-yard challenge. Fortunately, the course has five sets of tees; it's manageable for good players from the blues at 6,855 yards and more manageable still from the middle tees at 6,399 yards. The Green Monkey tests without being testy. There are few forced carries, few

"When we opened that [back] tee on 17 I had to give it a go. I couldn't carry the reservoir. I finally managed to hit one at the front tee boxes." —Michael Davern, director of golf at Sandy Lane

other holes. Like The Country Club course, The Green Monkey is broad-shouldered. The fairways are wide to accommodate shots played in the occasional strong trade winds, and the greens are large for the same reason. There's plenty of room to play the game, though a duck hook or a snap slice can find a limestone wall or two.

The back nine at The Green Monkey can play monstrously long from the back tees, known as the Masters tees. It's 3,914 yards from the tips. The 226-yard 16th hole, the shortest of the three par 3s on the back, plays down into the quarry floor where a large reservoir has been created. The longest of the par 3s is 270 yards all the way back, but it's downhill and downwind.

potential penalty strokes. It's a big course that's right in front of you and takes its rightful place near the top of the Caribbean golf hierarchy.

The Country Club course, while somewhat easier, is by no means a slouch. The bunkering here presents a stark contrast to The Green Monkey's, a difference seen vividly from the air. The Green Monkey fairway bunkers are large and flat, though they may contain a chunk of limestone here and there. The Country Club bunkers are small and deep. The Country Club fairways are wide—just don't stray too far. Those fairway bunkers are penal, and you may not be able to advance the ball more than wedge distance, and sometimes you may only be able to play out sideways.



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The Country Club has an appropriately benign start, with no par 4s longer than the 395-yard first. That is, until you get to the 500-yard par-4 seventh, which forces you to sit up and take notice. Like The Green Monkey, the back nine of The Country Club comes in trios of par 3s, 4s and 5s. The shortest of the 4s is 453 yards. The finish is a 195-yard par 3 across water into the wind. The Country Club, with many fairways lined with mahogany trees, is a treat that has a bit of trick to it.

Don't pass up playing Sandy Lane's Old Nine. This original course, built in 1961, isn't a pitch-and-putt, as it plays at more than 3,300 yards. It has old Bermuda grass greens and fairways that can be spotty and rough. It's a good

is not driven solely by the tourist trade, and that leads to a pleasing variety in the nature of golf development.

Willowbend Development, an offshoot of the Reebok shoe company, has a heavy interest in Puerto Rican golf. It runs the golf operation at the Westin Rio Mar, and designed, built and operates the new Costa Caribe Golf & Country Club in Ponce. The company also designed (in conjunction with Tom Kite), built and operates the 36-hole Coco Beach Golf & Country Club.

Costa Caribe, on a windswept plain overlooking the sea, is the first course in Ponce, the second largest city in Puerto Rico. Designed by Willowbend's Bruce Besse, Costa Caribe is a 27-hole member-

Puerto Rico has been at the center of golf course building in the Caribbean over the past five years. Six courses in various stages of development are under way here.

course to play if you have a significant amount of rust on your swing, though you can shake that off at the large practice ground at The Country Club.

A caddie is mandatory with every tee time at The Country Club and Green Monkey. If there is a knock on golf at Sandy Lane, it's that with greens fees as high as \$210 there are no oceanfront holes. Then again, with room rates in high season pushing \$1,000 a night and up, those greens fees seem like tip money.

Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico has been at the center of golf course building in the Caribbean over the past five years. Six course projects in various stages of development are under way here. In addition, the four Robert Trent Jones courses at Dorado Beach and Cerromar Beach have undergone recent renovations and boast new clubhouses. The venerable Dorado East remains one of the region's premier courses, east year hosting the Montecristo Cup, which is co-sponsored by CIGAR AFICIONADO and Altadis U.S.A. Inc. Puerto Rico also was slated to host the men's and women's World Amateur Team Championships at the Rio Mar Country Club in October. With nearly 5,000 members in the Puerto Rican Golf Association, golf on the island

ship course that is open to public play. It's planted entirely in Salem Seashore Paspalum grass, a strain developed for hot climates that is increasingly being used in place of Bermuda grass strains. It doesn't have the pronounced grain of Bermuda grass and every lie in the fairway is perfect.

To the east of Costa Caribe, near the southern town of Guayama, is Chi Chi Rodriguez's new facility, El Legado Golf Resort. This is Puerto Rican horse country and a working stable borders the east side of the course. Rodriguez has molded a 7,217-yard course from this relatively flat land, creating an island green for the par-5 finishing hole, which happens to be the 19th. Rodriguez is superstitious, so once you play the 12th hole, the next hole on the scorecard, and the course, is the 14th. "We think of it like a hotel, you know, the elevator," says his brother Jesus, who is running the place. "Chi Chi is superstitious about the number 13." A number of condominiums already dot the property, and a hotel is in the plans. While it calls itself a resort, El Legado has an appealing non-resort feel to it right now, a country course that is a real getaway.

Diaz's Coco Beach Country Club is a very well-rendered 36 holes with significant input from Champions Tour player and former U.S. Open winner Tom Kite. The



The Costa Caribe complex in Puerto Rico has 27 holes of golf and is now open for play.

The Dominican Republic has long been considered the Caribbean's golfing mecca and the new Dye Fore course at the Casa de Campo Resort enhances that well-deserved reputation.

holes here—be they inland, along a lagoon, in the marshlands or up into the hills—are thoughtfully detailed. The holes in the hilly country are clever and afford some lovely views of the ocean and the El Yunque rain forest. This fall, 18 holes are open, though the order will change once all 36 holes are complete. The current layout creates some awkward routing, but the holes are worthwhile. There really isn't a weak one in the bunch. Kite has made the course playable for everyone, yet there are difficult pin positions on every green that will test the best players. "Tom was very dedicated about getting all the details right," says Diaz. "I think we have done a job which can make us very proud and fulfill the dream of my father for this land."

Coco Beach is a massive development. A new all-inclusive hotel sits on the site, with another hotel to come. Time-share condominiums and more than 1,200 villas are planned. Diaz sees the day when Coco Beach will be open only to members, hotel guests and villa owners. But that day is probably far in the future. For now, tourists staying in San Juan have a fairly easy trek to Coco Beach.

The fate of two more new course projects is undetermined. A course in Caguas, an interior city south of San Juan, was built but has not been opened. A proposed Intercontinental resort called Cayo Largo on the east coast was built, then ran into a ton of legal issues and has not opened, either. That's a shame, since the Ron Garl-designed track there would clearly be considered one of the best in Puerto Rico. Even without these courses, Puerto Rico offers the most golf of any Caribbean island. And with so many Puerto Ricans playing, the game takes on a true island feel.

Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic is just a short hop west of Puerto Rico, and the Casa de Campo Resort courses at La Romana, designed by Pete Dye, have long been considered the Caribbean's true golfing mecca. Dye's Teeth of the Dog course is the Caribbean's No. 1 tract and he so loves the place that he has a home there. His latest offering at Casa de Campo is the burliest course in the Caribbean, called Dye Fore. It's a 7,770-yarder that plays on the ridge tops overlooking the Chavon River, occasionally running right down to it. "Everything about this course is big, big, big," says Gilles Gagnon, director of golf at Casa de Campo. "We get some pretty big wind up on the hill, so the fairways and greens are big. It's 7,700 yards, but nobody plays it there. I don't. It's plenty long enough from the shorter tees."

Two holes that catch everyone's attention are the par 3s, 12 and 15. From the back tee, 12 is 245 yards with a big gully in front of the green and the river to the left. It normally plays into the wind. "I've never played from the back tee," Gagnon says with a chuckle. "I can't hit my driver that far." The par-3 15th, at a more humane 210 yards, has a very deep bunker on the left and the river on the right.

Dye has also done some renovation work on the Dog now that the airport doesn't run through it. The runway for La Romana's old airport crossed some holes on the Teeth, and Dye has been itching to get that big concrete strip out of there for nearly two decades. Now that La Romana has a shiny new airport off the resort property, Dye has shined up the Dog with some new bunkers, new fairway mowing patterns and a new irrigation system.

Golfers just keep coming back to Casa de Campo, playing a whopping 110,000 rounds a year, 60 percent of which Gagnon figures is repeat business. For his Casa de Campo Open, held in September, it's about 90 percent for nearly 400 players. Greens fees here are quite reasonable, and Gagnon offers what he calls "memberships" instead of "packages" for golf that can reduce the fees to around \$100 per round.

North and East of La Romana is the burgeoning resort area of Punta Cana. At the Punta Cana Resort and Club, a high-end hotel and residential development, Pete Dye's son P. B. has designed the La Cana Golf Club with four holes that play along the Caribbean. The par-5 18th has been lifted almost directly from Pebble Beach, but here you can swim off the 18th green. Try doing that in the frigid rocky waters of the Pacific by Pebble Beach.

The Punta Cana area is where Jack Nicklaus has begun work on a large project at Cap Cana. Three courses are planned, one of which, Punta Espada, is under construction. And near Santo Domingo, Gary Player designed the Guavaberry Golf and Country Club, which opened in 2002.

It doesn't stop with those three islands.

Everywhere you turn, you'll find more golf. The White Witch Golf Club at the Ritz Carlton Resort near Montego Bay, Jamaica, is a hugely fun roller-coaster ride. The nearby Cinnamon Hill course has a wonderful back nine in the mountains and a front nine that reaches the Caribbean on two holes.

At the One&Only Ocean Club resort on Paradise Island, Bahamas, Tom Weiskopf was essentially handed the keys to the old, poorly maintained course there and told to completely renovate it, which he did in 2000. By grabbing up a defunct landing strip, Weiskopf fashioned a 7,159-yard test befitting a resort of this caliber. The short par-4 17th plays along a cove and is drivable, but not for the faint of heart.

Whether you're looking for a formidable challenge or just want to take in the breathtaking scenery, golf in the Caribbean is now more than just a flight of fancy. What is so beguiling from the skies is equally beguiling on the ground. Much imagination and money have gone into making parts of this precious landscape into some of the finest courses in the world. Finally, for the avid golfer, nothing is lacking in the Caribbean paradise. ♦

Jeff Williams is a sportswriter for Newsday on Long Island.



The dramatic new Dye Fore at Casa de Campo plays next to the Chavon River, with spectacular views of the premier resort in the Dominican Republic.