



LOCAL KNOWLEDGE: SIX TIPS FROM TOP PROS

**PUERTO RICO**

# GOLF

## **Complete Guide to THE GOLF COASTS**

Where to Play  
Where to Stay  
Where to Dine  
AND MORE...

### **RODRÍGUEZ RULES**

A Chat with Chi Chi

### **DON QUIXOTE'S QUEST**

Turning Cane Fields  
Into Country Clubs

### **PLUS**

Mixing a Killer Mojito  
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A SUPPLEMENT TO T&L GOLF

SOUTH COAST:  
**CARIBBEAN CONQUESTS**



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### **Don Quixote's Quest**

Alberto Torruella, a scion of the Serrallés family rum dynasty, stands on an upper floor balcony at his grandmother's

former castle high above the south coast city of Ponce. Behind him, the island's Central Mountains are verdant green beneath a soft cover of clouds. Off in the distance in front of him, the family's old sugar mill, their Don Q rum distillery branded in honor of the mythic Spanish literary figure Don Quixote, their Ponce Hilton & Casino, and their new Costa Caribe Golf & Country Club are framed by the sparkling waters of the Caribbean.

"I considered living in other places in the United States and in South America," Torruella declares. "But Puerto Rico beckoned because it's paradise."

A soft-spoken seventy year old with lightly freckled skin, Torruella represents the fifth generation of a family that emigrated from the Catalonia region of Spain in 1810 and now counts over 400 direct descendants. He attended boarding school in Connecticut, and earned both an undergraduate degree and a law degree from Cornell in Ithaca, New York. But after working as a lawyer in San Juan, he returned to Ponce, the island's second largest city (population 200,000), to help revitalize a region whose economic prospects waned with the demise of the sugar industry after World War II.

"There is not a single active sugar mill left in Puerto Rico," Torruella notes as he climbs down from the balcony of the 1930s vintage Serrallés castle, which is now a municipal museum. "It is a very labor intensive business, and over time, as the standard of living increased, people lost interest in working in the cane fields."

Torruella points out that the Serrallés family has been making rum in Ponce since 1865, and their Don Q

The island green of the par three twelfth at Costa Caribe

**SOUTH COAST:**  
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WENDELL METZNER/INDEX STOCK



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Above: Serrallés Castle. Left: Municipal Firehouse built for the Ponce Exhibition Fair of 1882. Below: Pool at the Ponce Hilton & Casino. Right: The twenty-seventh at Costa Caribe Golf & Country Club



COURTESY OF PONCE HILTON & CASINO

facility, which also produces brands such as Ron Rico and Captain Morgan along with vodka, gin, and cordials, remains one of only two active distilleries on the island, the other being the Bacardi plant outside San Juan. But he sees tourism and golf, which are already well established on the north and east coasts, as keys to the future of Ponce and the south coast.

Three years ago, Torruella's family company purchased the 153-room Ponce Hilton & Casino from the government. He now plans to add another wing with 100 rooms and 215 condominiums. His pet project,

however, is Costa Caribe, a 27 hole complex that is blossoming in a former cane field across a narrow river adjacent to the Ponce Hilton property.

For Torruella, the advent of Costa Caribe signals an opportunity to return to a sport that he abandoned after taking some introductory lessons in college. "I didn't

start playing golf again until I was 64," he confides.

Unlike Don Quixote, Torruella is not merely tilting at windmills with his golf clubs. His construction crews are on the verge of completing a bridge between the Ponce Hilton and Costa Caribe, and he has already decided to go on a quest to lower his handicap. "I better start practicing," he says with a smile.

### Viva Caribe

If the golf gods had decided to give birth to the game on the south coast of Puerto Rico instead of on the firths of Scotland, they would surely have created a course like Costa Caribe Golf & Country Club. Designed by Bruce Besse of Willowbend Golf & Land Design, this spectacular 27 hole complex on a former sugar cane field by the sea can best be described as a Caribbean linksland formed by the forces of man and nature.

Man has bestowed Costa Caribe with nineteen lakes,

over one thousand transplanted palm trees, stands of buffalo grass and bougainvillea, and fairways of salam sea shore paspalum Bermuda grass that preserve the environment and make golf balls easier to hit. Nature, meanwhile, has provided winds that routinely blow 35 m.p.h., flocks of wild ducks, pelicans, and egrets, and facing views of the Central Mountains and the Caribbean.

At press time, only eighteen holes at Costa Caribe were open for play with the remaining nine due to be completed during 2004, but early visitors had plenty to whet their golfing palates. Among the features that give this gem a links feel and distinguish it from most other courses in Puerto Rico are close cropped approach ramps to many of the greens that invite low trajectory bump-and-run shots as well as high-lofted pitches. Both the eighteenth and twenty-seventh holes will finish within fifty yards of the Caribbean in sight of a 32,000 square foot clubhouse flanked by a swimming pool and 104 luxury golf villas.



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