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Finding romance in Punta Cana

Excellence el Carmen offers total adult-only luxury
BY GINA BURCH
Florida Weekly Correspondent



If a romantic getaway is calling your name this Valentines month, the new Excellence el Carmen, luxury all-inclusive resort in Punta Cana has a suite with your name on it. The newest adults-only property in the Dominican Republic opened Sept. 1 and is getting rave reviews for attention to detail.

Some travelers have a love/hate relationship with all-inclusive properties. They love the ease of having as much food and drink at their disposal as they want, for one price. But not all of these resorts are created equal as some still charge for upgrades in food and liquor, and the quality can be questionable.

The rooms at Excellence el Carmen are all suites and they are all stocked with full bottles of premium spirits. Raid the mini bar at midnight, and by noon the next day, thanks to housekeeping, there are no signs of your transgressions, and no astronomical charges at checkout.

With 12 international dining options here, none charge extra for lobster (most Caribbean all-inclusives do) and reservations are not taken so you have complete flexibility. The only extras are for the high-end wines, cellared at a couple of restaurants on property, otherwise the house wines flow freely.

This new, spotless resort has a contemporary Caribbean vibe with tropical vegetation, swaying palm trees, hammocks, beautiful clear blue water and plenty of beach chairs so you don't have to get up at the crack of dawn to reserve one.



Designed with romance and relaxation in mind, Excellence has all bases covered. The showers are built for two and so are the Jacuzzi tubs. However, you won't find the tubs in the bathroom; they face the beach or pools with floor-to-ceiling windows and curtains for privacy.

Water is important here so every suite has some kind of aquatic view. Some rooms have swim-up options while others have private pools surrounded by shrubbery.



The modern rooms with high-tech amenities are twice as large as those found in similar resorts, 800 to 25,000 square feet. To make you feel at home, the closets are walk-in, with fluffy robes on hangers and shelves for your shoes. The two-story honeymoon suites are spectacular, with roof-top pools and lounge areas.

Even the spa is filled with rooms for couples massages and other relaxing treatments. The Aqua Wellness Hydrotherapy circuit is a unique way to start. With the mountains as a backdrop, it includes a circuit of water massages, Swedish saunas, steam baths, cold plunges and more.

Each building has a concierge desk catering to all your needs; you won't have to leave your room for days. But when you do, there are a host of activities such as water sports, Spanish and dance lessons, games, fitness trails and a 4000-square-foot gym.

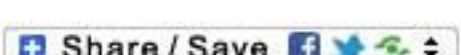
Attracting guest from all over the world with its casual elegance, romance packages, entertainment and superb dining, the resort is worthy of more than a mere weekend getaway.

Basics about the resort

- Excellence is about half an hour from Punta Cana International Airport. For excursions into the countryside, it's wise to book through the resort.
- Wall outlets are compatible to American-made electronic devices. Calls to the U.S. and Canada are free from your room.
- There are no direct flights on major airlines from Fort Myers to Punta Cana. Be prepared for a \$10 tourist tax on arrival. If you don't pay in advance and print out a receipt, you'll have to present cash. The \$20 departure tax is typically included in your airfare. |



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