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## Golf, spa among the many diversions at Casa de Campo

With steam rising off my skin after emerging from the hot tub, I stood at the edge of an icy plunge pool and contemplated my options. I had signed a waiver that said submergence in hot water, followed by a chilly dip, could result in some sort of dire emergency.

I stuck a toe into the pool, and it was cold. But my husband, Chris, was in the pool, yelling, "Come on, jump in!"

I couldn't let him beat me. So I jumped in.

I screamed bloody murder as I hit the water. My cardiovascular system lurched into overdrive. On a dare, we both did it again.

The water ritual -- sauna and steam room; a self-inflicted body scrubbing with oily concoctions of organic lavender, salt and espresso; showers; and then dunks in both hot and cold pools -- was an oddly satisfying reward after a long day touring the 7,000 acres of Casa de Campo on the east coast of the Dominican Republic.

Another reward was the side-by-side couples massage that followed, during which Chris and I blissfully conked out.

Casa de Campo is home to the elegant, ecofriendly Cygalle Healing Spa and more attractions, lodgings, restaurants and activities than we could possibly see during a two-night stay.

### Room Key: Casa de Campo, Dominican Republic

Address: Casa de Campo, La Romana, Dominican Republic.

Phone: (800) 877-3643

Web: [www.casadecampo.com.do](http://www.casadecampo.com.do)

Rooms: 265 guestrooms and 100 villa homes

Rates: Golf & Spa package, three-night minimum stay through Dec. 20, from \$198 per room, per night, double, with breakfast, golf cart and daily golf or spa amenity.

Facilities: Three pools; three golf courses; spa; equestrian center; polo facilities; tennis center with 13 courts; marina and yacht club; more than 20 restaurants and bars.

Review: An unmatched variety of experiences, excellent dining and personal guest service at Cygalle Healing Spa.



**Casa de Campo's Cygalle Healing Spa offers a number of its own products for sale in the spa's boutique shop.**

After all that pampering, we capped the night with a romantic dinner for two in a private, beachside cabana at the Beach Club by Le Cirque on Minitas Beach. Our waiter plied us with champagne, a brilliant lobster meal and a sampler of every dessert on the menu.

Early the next day, we dashed for the Lago Grill just steps from our superior guestroom. We looked out across the misty, seemingly benign landscape of the Teeth of the Dog, the iconic golf course we were about to play.

The Teeth of the Dog's reputation as one of the Caribbean's most venerable courses preceded it. The Pete Dye-signature course is one of three Dye designs at the resort. With staggering views, seven wind-whipped waterside holes and a vicious reputation that is well deserved, the Teeth of the Dog has consistently ranked among the world's top courses since it opened in 1971.

Our caddie enjoyed debating with Chris over estimated yardages. For me, a rank beginner, it was all he could do to be tolerant and say things like "Keep your head down" as I hit into the water or the rough.

Malfeasance was everywhere. The wind, the terrain and the pitch all conspired against me. At what seemed like 865 over par on the front nine, done in by wind and water, I bailed, vowing to come back when I'd found a real swing.

The day before, I had gone in search of my elusive swing in a lesson with golf pro Pierre Gagnon. Chain-smoking and avuncular, Gagnon chatted amiably while Chris swung and connected solidly with ball after ball. "You never get tired of Teeth of the Dog," Gagnon said, as he casually whacked the ball 200 yards with one hand. "If I had to play one course for the rest of my life, I could play this one every day. It will always surprise you."

As I practiced a swing drill that involved rotating my upper body inside an imaginary Hula-Hoop, Gagnon spoke of finding my natural swing as I hacked at the turf. The process felt entirely unnatural, until finally I hit a ball that went "ping!" and traveled farther than any that I'd hit before.

I was elated as I watched it travel. It was really, truly airborne. Gagnon stood back and said, "See, that's the one that makes you want to keep playing."

But golf is far from the only feature of a Casa de Campo stay, as we learned on a tour, zipping around to see the equestrian center, the tennis center, the beach, the pools, the shooting center, various rooms and villas available for rental.

We whizzed around in our minivan, visiting Altos de Chavon, a replica of a 16th century Mediterranean town that lies on the resort's grounds.

We stopped at the La Marina Chavon pier, and as we wended our way through the narrow streets lined by pastel-hued, low-rise buildings, Chris said that it looked like Portofino, the Italian port city.

The huge marina area was practically deserted as we sat down for lunch at Chinois, a streetside sushi spot. I realized that to do Casa de Campo justice, there would have to be another, low-speed trip in the future.



*Altos de Chavon at Casa de Campo is a re-created 16th century Mediterranean artisans' village, complete with winding streets, cafes and street music.*