


# *your perfect* GETAWAY

It has to be someplace warm, of course. Other musts: a postcard-pretty beach that begs for bare feet, food that's fresh and creative, an enticing list of drinks, spa interludes and activities we don't have time for at home. Apple Vacations and Punta Cana deliver on all levels. Let the relaxation begin!

WRITTEN BY BARBARA MORROW



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**Dominican Republic**  
Has it all



## Experience the Dominican Republic

Children in neat uniforms smile shyly, as our Outback Safari guide tells us about their village school. But soon they're gathered around one member of our group who came prepared. She hands out pencils and notebooks—precious commodities in this simple one-room school and a handful of surrounding cottages neatly painted in colors bright as tropical flowers. Once again, I am thankful that I didn't give into the temptation to just stay on the beach. That gratitude dawned almost as soon as the open truck began jolting into lush mountains where small farms grow cocoa and coffee. By the time lunch is served in a mountain-top pavilion, we're united in our admiration of all things Dominican—the scenery, the food and especially the warmth of everyone we meet.

**Travel Tips** Apple offers 19 excursions that you can book as part of packages or on arrival. For more local culture:

- Tour Santo Domingo, one of the Americas' oldest cities.
- Explore enclaves where artists and crafters live and work. Bring your camera!



A nonstop flight lands at a new grass-roofed airport on the eastern shore of the Dominican Republic, within a half hour of a 30-mile stretch of white sand and 60 hotels that range from comfortable and budget-friendly to still-affordable and posh.

For the first day at the NH Royal Beach, I am fixated on warmth—soaking up sun walking on a white beach that starts steps from the room and goes on forever and drifting in the just-right water of the serpentine pool. The swim-up bar has drinks, and the beach cafe has snacks, so there's no reason to head inside until the light is fading.

The elegant buffet restaurant appears designed for just such schedule-free days. The food lineup seems as long as the beach and much more colorful. I start with made-to-order sushi, noting the array of desserts, pies and cakes as well as parfaits and pretty, petite truffles. Calories hardly count in bite-size form, right? The next evening, the tasting menu at sleekly appointed Pure, one of three order-from-a-menu restaurants, features a perfectly prepared fillet *and* grilled grouper presented with fine-restaurant flair. As a finale, a warm chocolate volcano erupts on cue—just about the time Latin rhythms beckon from a courtyard spreading beneath a star-filled sky.

More perfect getaways:

**Hard Rock Hotel and Casino** The second largest casino in the Caribbean is just the start at this rock star of a getaway. Beyond 400 blinking slots, 40 tables and a





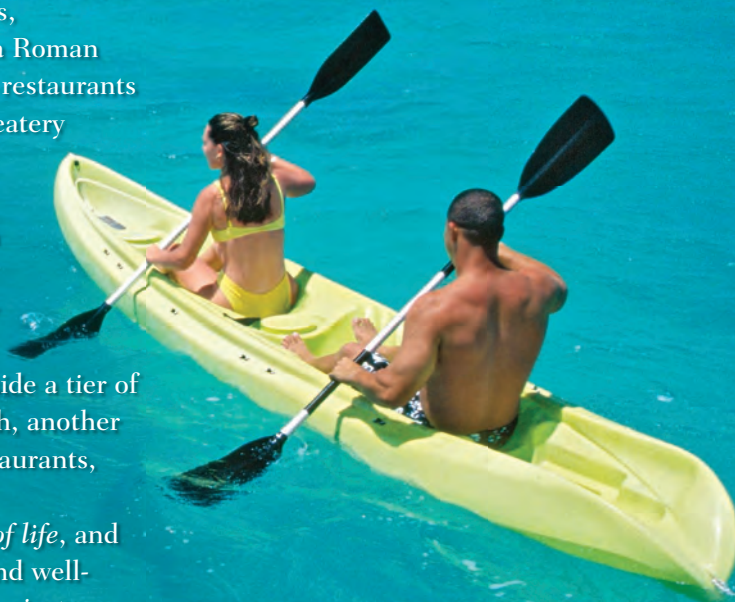
(Clockwise, from left) Secrets Sanctuary unfolds in a lush oceanside setting at the southern edge of Punta Cana. Many of the rooms and cottages look out on the water. A spa day is essential to a perfect vacation. Some Apple resort packages include kayaking and other water activities such as windsurfing and snorkeling.



sports bar with a dizzying 90 flat-screen TVs, the revamped resort offers a spa worthy of a Roman emperor and plush standard rooms. Eleven restaurants range from a soon-to-be-unveiled gourmet eatery to a 24/7 ice cream parlor.

**Secrets Sanctuary** This is the place to tap into your inner sheik. Wide decks reach out over the ocean from rooms in a replica Moorish castle and seaside cottages. Cushy beds and step-down square marble baths in some rooms also overlook the waves. Beside a tier of pools cascading to a white crescent of beach, another deck holds the Blue Marlin, one of five restaurants, serving fresh seafood at ocean-view tables.

**Zoëtry Agua** The name *Zoëtry* means *art of life*, and it truly fits this intimate reservoir of calm and well-being. The resort has 51 rooms, some with private pools beside the beach. Menus at three restaurants, including grass-roofed, ocean-side Indigo, emphasize



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fresh, local ingredients and healthy choices—even lower-calorie cocktails. You can simply bask in the sunny peace or sample activities like couples' massages in the spa cabin, kayaking trips, wellness seminars, on-beach cooking classes and horseback riding.

**Ocean Blue** First-timers at this family-friendly golf and beach resort inevitably do a double take. The plaza outside the reception building resembles a small-town U.S. Main Street, complete with a local coffee shop and a Route 66 Cafe. There's also a Dominican restaurant and a casino—all usually quiet until evening. On a sunny morning, the action is closer to the beach. A water-aerobics class bobs to Lady Gaga, as a group of teens takes turns scaling the climbing wall. Tables are just starting to fill at a buffet restaurant, where choices range from fried chicken and grilled fish to a station where kids can load up on hotdogs and burgers.

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**PERFECT  
GETAWAY**

Go to **applevacations.com**  
or see your professional  
travel agent

### Your perfect Apple Vacation includes:

- ★ nonstop round-trip airfare from Lambert-St. Louis International Airport to Punta Cana Airport. Early-morning flights guarantee you'll arrive in time to soak up the rays.
- ★ plentiful choices in food, lodgings, activities and more!
- ★ pampering lodgings, all customer-rated.
- ★ meals, snacks and beverages, even room service.
- ★ entertainment and a variety of water sports.
- ★ on-site Apple representatives.\*
- ★ baggage handling/airport transportation.
- ★ taxes, service charges and gratuities.

\*Apple Vacations Resort Representatives are provided by Amstar or other independent destination management companies providing services to Apple Vacations' customers.

  
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