



## Tee Time in Puerto Rico

A favorite among American travelers for its accessibility and beautiful beaches, Puerto Rico is fast becoming one of the Caribbean's top golf destinations as well. By Brian McCallen, Photograph by Joann Dost

When Columbus singled out Puerto Rico for its beauty, golf had already been established as a favorite pastime in Europe. These many centuries later, Puerto Rico, a U.S. commonwealth where English is widely spoken, has reasserted itself as one of the Caribbean's top golf destinations.

You don't need a passport to enter Puerto Rico, but you will need your A game at two brilliantly revived courses—plus one striking newcomer—that combine to offer visiting players and savvy investors plenty of options east and west of San Juan.

**Royal Isabela** Seventy-five miles west of San Juan in Puerto Rico's northwest corner is **Royal Isabela**, one of the most spectacular new golf courses to debut in the Caribbean in many years. Developed by brothers and former tennis stars Charlie and Stanley Pasarell, this one-of-a-kind layout sprawls across rolling tableland 200 feet above the frothy Atlantic Ocean.



The green on Royal Isabela's first hole

The centerpiece of a 426-acre resort community, the course is marked by sharp elevation changes, limestone outcrops, and natural sand dunes. Broad cliff-top fairways and sod-faced bunkers create a multitude of strategies for each shot, as do the brisk trade winds. "Tropical Scotland" is how Stanley describes the course, adding, "If the Open Championship ever leaves the British Isles, this could be the venue." At full stretch—7,667 yards, par 73—Royal Isabela is one tough coconut, though staggered sets of forward tees offer graduated challenges to higher handicappers.

Observant players will detect a sense of naturalness at Royal Isabela. During the construction phase, the majority of the shaping was done by hand, reflecting the developers' desire to tread lightly on the land. Natural lakes were integrated into the design of the course, as were deep chasms that call for death-or-glory shots. Conceived as a sustainable development, more than 20,000 native trees and indigenous plants were propagated and grown in on-site nurseries, using seeds and cuttings gathered on the property.

Aided by David Pfaff, a former Pete Dye associate, the Pasarells let the existing landforms dictate the course routing. "It's an unbelievable piece of land," says Charlie. "We spent years walking the property until we uncovered a golf course." Recognizing that resort golf should, above all, be fun, the Pasarells built plenty of entertainment into their design. For example, there's an infinity-edge green that appears to float on the distant sea, an atoll-like island green, plus a cliff-top double green that serves the 12th and 14th holes. There's also a quirky original feature: The sixth hole, with two separate fairways and two separate greens, can be played either as a par 4 or a par 5. (The brothers couldn't agree and so they built both options.)

In April 2012, Royal Isabela will unveil a lodge with 20 guest casitas. Additional amenities will include a clubhouse, restaurant, swimming pool, tennis courts, and a spa and fitness center. The property also has an organic farm, 27 miles of hiking trails, and world-class surfing.

Royal Isabela's home sites, ranging in size from one to two acres, are spaced around the golf course and overlook the ocean. Lots start at \$2 million. Each Fairway Villa provides over 1,500 square feet of living space and features two master suites, a covered terrace, and a plunge pool. Villas start at \$1 million.

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