

HEADING SOUTH FOR THE WINTER

FLORIDA

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

LEEWARD ISLANDS

CONSIDER A STOPOVER AT THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC DURING THE ANNUAL YACHT MIGRATION TO THE LEEWARDS.

TEXT BY JIM RAYCROFT

THE USUAL SUSPECTS ON A TRANSIT FROM SOUTH FLORIDA TO THE CARIBBEAN'S LEEWARDS INCLUDE THE various Bahamian island groups, which have long been a choice yachting destination, offering everything from hot casino action in Nassau to the laidback peace and beauty of the Exumas. Farther along the route—northeast of the forbidden fruit of Cuba—the British territory of the Turks and Caicos lays claim to some of the world's most beautiful beaches while offering its own unique blend of quiet, peaceful luxury. From here many a transiting yacht would simply push on to the Virgin Islands and work their way down the chain but in doing so they suffer an opportunity lost—a near miss of the Dominican Republic.

Occupying the eastern two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola, the Dominican Republic is part of the second largest Caribbean island after Cuba. Nature has been very kind to the eastern portion of Hispaniola, distributing a wealth of natural beauty with abundant flora, fauna, scenic coastlines and dramatic landscapes.

The Dominican government is doing what it can to preserve the ecosystems with a conservation plan comprising 83 locations with 19 national parks, 15 natural reserves, six scientific reserves, 32 natural monuments, two marine sanctuaries and nine areas of protected islands.

Within this tropical beauty is “an island within the island,” as Captain Gui Garcia of the motor yacht *Ocean Paradise* describes it. Lying just around the eastern tip of the island on the Caribbean southern shore is the luxury resort and marina Casa de Campo. The resort's name translates to “country house or cottage,” however the 7,000-acre wonderland is, in reality, anything but. Following its multimillion-dollar refit, the all-new Casa de Campo is a rising star in the Caribbean.

With 40 years of experience and hospitality under its belt, Casa de Campo has had plenty of time to work things out and get it right. “Teeth of the Dog” is the first of three Casa de Campo golf courses created



PHOTO BY JIM RAYCROFT (TOP); COURTESY OF DOMINICAN REPUBLIC MINISTRY OF TOURISM (BOTTOM)

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Casa de Campo's marina is just a small portion of the 7,000-acre resort. Its 72-par Teeth of the Dog golf course (top) has seven holes that touch the Caribbean Sea. Sailing yacht *Athena* has a perfect view.

by Pete Dye, considered by many to be one of the most authoritative golf course architects of all time. It took two years to complete. Opening in 1971, it included seven holes along the edge of the Caribbean Sea, transforming a rugged coral rock coastline into a challenging world-class 6,888-yard, par 72 course, which has been ranked number one in the Caribbean (and 43rd in the world) by Golf Magazine. In 2012, Casa de Campo beat out 32,000 courses to win a World Travel Award for World's Leading Golf Resort—for the fifth consecutive time.

But a world-class Caribbean island resort without a marina was literally missing the boat. As luck would have it, renowned Italian architect Gianfranco Fini was commissioned to design a villa for a friend at Casa de Campo in 1988. He fell in love with the place and together with Piero Giacosa envisioned building a seaside community where the Chavón River meets the Caribbean Sea. Bringing the dream halfway around the world, they met with the owners of Casa de Campo and laid out their plan in 1993. Inspired by the charm of an old Mediterranean fishing village, it would become La Marina and would grow to cover almost one million square feet of oceanfront paradise. After five years of research and planning, construction began in 1998 with the first boat tying up to the dock in 2001.

The village contains 105 villas and townhouse residences, many with spectacular marina views, balconies and private docks, while numerous trendy shops line the Calle Barlovento with all paths leading to the Piazza Portofino. An airy open arching shape with beautiful restaurants and cafes, the Piazza is the centerpiece of the Casa de Campo Marina and the backdrop for nightlife, shows and cultural events, all with a casual elegant Mediterranean atmosphere.

Nearby is the Casa de Campo Yacht Club, an architectural beauty harking back to an earlier time with its "Club" bar and winding staircase leading up to terraces with open ocean views. The 350-slip marina can handle yachts of up to 250 feet with draft up to 16 feet. Also located at the marina is the IBC Shipyard, a gold rated Azimut full-service center with 120-ton Travelift.

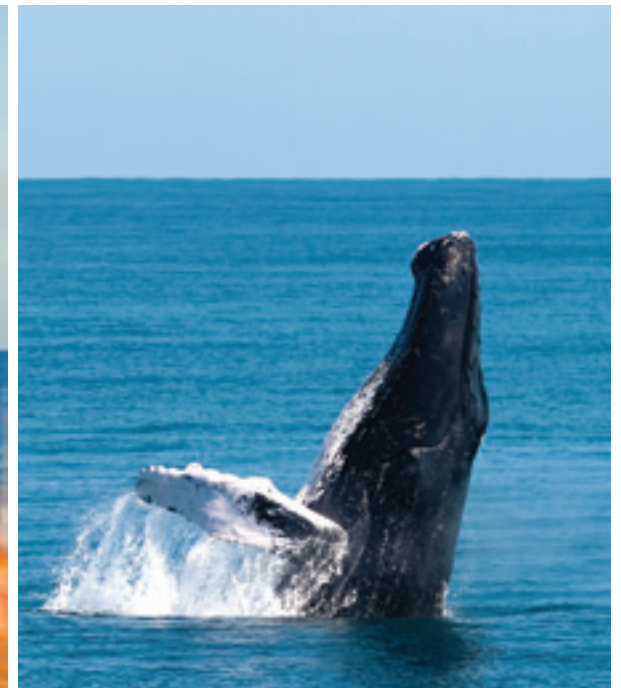
Logistically, Casa de Campo makes a convenient base. Captain Cumming of the 295-foot sailing yacht *Athena*, which recently visited, points out that several flights a week to the complex's onsite airport bring in exotic items like fresh berries from the U.S. While *Athena's* nearly 19-foot draft prohibited her from entering the marina, the yacht's guests and crew were made welcome by the marina staff while the yacht, anchored offshore, nicely framed the 17th hole at the Teeth of the Dog.

In addition to the golf, *Athena's* owners and guests enjoyed the shooting range, the Playa Minitas Beach Club and the resort's spas. For horse lovers, horseback riding and polo are other Casa de Campo attractions, or for the more hilarious rendition, there's donkey polo...seriously.

Resort guests can tender up the Rio Chavón, a river

emptying into the Caribbean. Its primordial charm made it an ideal backdrop for *Jurassic Park* and one of the filming locations for *Apocalypse Now*. Four hundred steps up is what looks to be another movie set, and for good reason: The medieval-lookalike town of Altos de Chavón was conceived by the chairman and a set designer of Paramount Pictures. Cobbled together in the late 1970s using the stone remnants of a nearby road and bridge-building project, the charming European cobblestone streets sport tourist-friendly restaurants, cigar shops and art galleries as well as a 5,000-seat Roman style amphitheater.

Leaving Casa de Campo by water, a popular yacht destination is Palmilla, what the locals call "the natural pool," an offshore sandbar with clear waist-deep waters teeming



with starfish. About five miles offshore of Casa de Campo is the environmentally protected island of Catalina, offering a unique underwater museum. The Captain Kidd Living Museum Under the Sea encompasses the remains of the last ship Kidd reportedly captured, the *Quedagh Merchant*. Wrecked in just 10 feet of water, 70 feet offshore, it is accessible to all who are willing to get their hair wet, not just experienced divers. Considering its very accessible position, it's remarkable that the wreck was only discovered five years ago.

Farther to the east lies one of the country's largest offshore islands, Saona, which features the pristine, white-sand beaches of a movie-ready deserted island. It is offshore of the country's largest national park, Parque Nacional del Este, or National Park of the East, which sports renowned beaches among a coastline of mangroves and protected reefs. And for those wanting to stretch their legs, a mile-

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Beyond the Casa de Campo compound, natural wonders like humpback whale mating and picture-perfect beaches mix with manmade attractions. The medieval-inspired town of Altos de Chavón (top left) overlooks Rio Chavón, while visitors can scuba El Peñón (above), a long reef divided into three dive sites off the coastal town of Bayahibe. Located in Santo Domingo, the oldest Viceregal residence in the Americas, Alcazar de Colón (far right) was built by Diego Colón, son of Christopher Columbus, as a governor's mansion.



PHOTOS BY JIM RANCIORI (TOP RIGHT, MIDDLE); COURTESY OF DOMINICAN REPUBLIC MINISTRY OF TOURISM



long guided trail called the Padre Nuestro Ecological and Archeological Jungle Trail leads into the park from close to Bayahibe town, showing off 294 species of plants along the way. The archeological part is found among the park's many caves preserving cave art from the time of the Taino, the original inhabitants during the pre-Columbus era.

Farther afield from this southern base in the Dominican Republic, Captain Maurizio Capitani of the 140-foot motor yacht *My Johanna* suggests cruising north along the eastern coast to the endless beaches of Punta Cana, which he describes as "classic Caribbean." Continuing northwest brings yachts to the remote Samaná Peninsula. While not an attraction on a fall transit south to the Lesser Antilles, it is a must-do on the return trip north following the humpback whale's winter mating season. Whale-watching season runs from mid-January to mid-March when thousands of humpback whales gather at a reef known as Silver Bank, located 70 miles northeast of Puerto Plata. From here many of the whales will move on to Samana Bay, which has been identified by the World Wildlife Fund as one of the world's best places to watch literally hundreds of humpbacks on any given day during the mating season.

Bordering the bay is Los Haitises National Park, a postcard-perfect place, says Captain Capitani, and a popular protected eco-tourism destination consisting of approximately 1,600 square miles. Accessible by boat with only a portion open to the public, the park offers great experiences for hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking and 4x4 wheeling. A short ride across the San Lorenzo Bay is the Paraíso Caño Hondo eco-tourism project, which offers incredible inland streams waiting to be explored.

All of this natural beauty alongside the facilities and attractions of marina resorts such as Casa de Campo have been building up a good reputation among superyacht captains, making the Dominican Republic more attractive than ever to visiting yachts.

"Speaking personally, it's refreshing to find a corner of the Caribbean that isn't like a bus station!" says *Athena's* Captain Cumming. ■



fact file

CAPITAL: Santo Domingo, the oldest permanent European settlement in the Americas

POPULATION: 10,219,630 (2013 census)

CURRENCY: Dominican peso; U.S. dollars and the euro are also accepted at most tourist sites.

LANGUAGE: Spanish

TIME ZONE: GMT -4

CLIMATE:

Tropical; January/February are the coolest months, August is hottest.

WHEN TO GO: High season is December through February. February is the time of the national carnival and a good time for whale watching. November also has good weather. Rainy season is May through October.

GETTING THERE:

Three airports service Casa de Campo:

(LRM) La Romana – on resort premises

(SDQ) Santo Domingo – 70 minutes from resort

(PUJ) Punta Cana – 90 minutes from resort

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS: Passport required. Those who do not obtain a DR visa must purchase a \$10 tourist card (good for 60 days).

YACHT ENTRY: The Marina at Casa de Campo is a port of entry. Contact the Harbour Master at Casa de Campo for current clearance information:

Captain Frank Castillo:

f.castillo@casadecampomarina.com.do

Marina Casa de Campo: Tel: +1 809 523 2111 or +1 809 523 2112; www.marinacasadecampo.com.do; VHF 68/16

TOURISM: www.godominicanrepublic.com; Tel: +1 809 221 4660

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