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Cap Cana's five-kilometre beach; Eden Roc at Cap Cana Resort's Garden of Eden pool (right)

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC ISLAND UPGRADE

Vanessa Craft lives la dolce vita on her honeymoon.

The Dominican Republic has changed since the first time I waded into its cyan-blue waters. Back then, my vacation was fuelled entirely by cheap (equally) blue cocktails during a single-girls all-inclusive party break.

My drink palate and relationship status have evolved since then, and so has the DR. With the slew of new five-star properties catering to selective, luxe-loving travellers now dotting the diverse island, it was difficult to decide where to go for our honeymoon. But my new husband and I chose perhaps the most exclusive spot: Eden Roc at Cap Cana Resort, a 34-villa hotel that is part of the Relais & Châteaux group. It's also part of Cap Cana, a gated community on the eastern tip of the island that is home to five kilometres of white-sand beaches, private villas, a yacht-filled marina, an equestrian centre



The private pool at one of Eden Roc's villas

with polo fields, ecological parks and several award-winning golf courses.

My heart leaped when I discovered a long cedar walk-in closet off our suite's bathroom, which had a coral-stone and marble tub so big it took an hour to fill. My husband was so busy playing with the iPads used to control all the settings in the suite that he didn't notice we had a private pool and an alfresco rain shower head on the back patio. The personal golf cart parked outside the suite, however, was instantly noted. Here, golf carts are a necessity for getting around the sprawling grounds or visiting the members-only Caletón Beach Club, a secluded palm-fringed cove.

At nearby Scape Park, we decided against our tour guide's suggestion that we zipline from the cliffs. (I knew I had made the right choice of spouse by how fast my guy rejected that option.) Instead, we took the Hoyo Azul eco tour, an easy hike through a jungle rich with endemic plants and edged by rugged cliffs that ended at a picture-perfect swimming spot: a hidden lagoon with Smurf-hued water.

On our last night, the concierge at Eden Roc booked us a private dinner on the beach. But as we set out in our golf cart, the skies opened up. The rain was torrential, and the cart's plastic tarp did little to stop the sheets of water pelting down on us. My husband drove while I screeched out directions in the darkness. It was our big, romantic *The Notebook*-rain-scene moment, but our passion was soon directed at the helpful wait staff at La Palapa—a stunning local seafood restaurant—who rushed out with big golf umbrellas to escort us to shelter. We ate dinner overlooking the beach, listening to the waves crashing against the shore while the rain beat down on the roof above us. It still felt like a romantic Hollywood moment.



WHAT TO PACK

Nylon and spandex bikini top (\$29.95) and bottoms (\$24.95), Dynamite (dynamite.ca); polyurethane and leather bag, Mara Hoffman (\$205, marahoffman.com); rayon shorts, Missoni (\$730, at NET-A-PORTER.com)

EDITOR'S BLACK BOOK

EAT Embrace decadence (and the expert sommelier, your soon-to-be best friend) at Eden Roc's Mediterraneo Restaurant. Order the *torchon* foie gras with brioche and Porto wine jelly. A table on the open, airy terrace is a must.

SPA The 1,900-square-metre Spa at Sanctuary Cap Cana is set within towering medieval-like walls. Try the stimulating endorphin-releasing hydrotherapy circuit. Or, hole up with your spa partner in one of the cozy thatched cabins by the pool for a couples massage.



SWIM Hoyo Azul, or the "blue hole," in the 30-hectare Scape Park (a forest reserve for endangered species including sea turtles, the Ridgeway hawk and the Ricordi iguana), is a serene mineral-rich blue lagoon at the bottom of a 65-metre cliff. Although it is around 37 metres deep, the glowing-blue water is so clear that you can see to the bottom. A swim selfie is mandatory.



BAHAMAS BEHIND THE SCENES: ELLE CANADA'S FIRST TRAVEL VIDEO DIARY

Aliyah Shamsheer on what it was like to shoot our first video story at Kamalame Cay in the Bahamas.

It's one thing to write a travel story; it's something else entirely to shoot a video and have two camera guys and two producers (and, at times, even a drone!) follow you and film your every move.

I arrived at Kamalame Cay, just off the coast of Andros Island in the Bahamas, by seaplane on a very hot afternoon. It all felt so glamorous—right up until the pilot turned around and said with a chuckle, "You're going to have to swim to shore." I laughed because I thought he was joking. But he was definitely not joking. He clearly did not get the memo that I was going to be on film and that I was in no position to swim to shore. (To be clear, I was wearing a blazer.) When I finally got off the plane, the first thing I did was drop my shoe—which proceeded to float away.

I did eventually make it to shore (you'll have to watch the video to find out how), and I was able to complete the shoot. And while there were times when I was very (very) aware of the cameras—like while I was paddle boarding in my bikini (thank God for Pilates) or trying to take a meditative beach walk with a drone hovering behind me—by the end of the long weekend, I barely noticed they were there. (But they were definitely there.) And the end result? You'll just have to watch the video to:

1. See what draws celebs like Nicole Kidman to this hideaway.
2. Meet my "mermaid" snorkelling instructor.
3. See what it's like to ride a bike through palm trees like you're in your own tropical music video.
4. Hear about the cutest raccoon ever.
5. Find out if I ever retrieved that shoe. □