

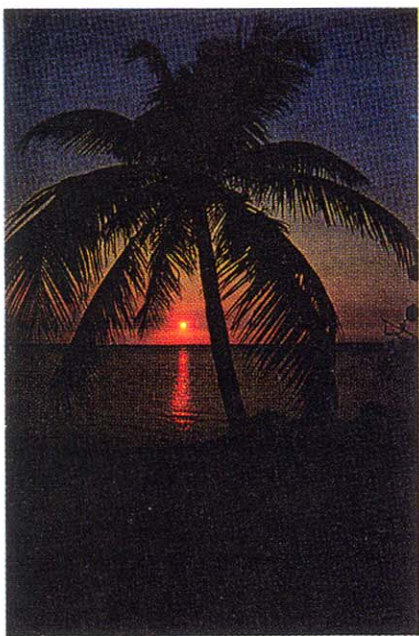


FANTASTIC VOYAGE

PBI'S OWN MODERN-DAY EXPLORER DISCOVERS WHAT COLUMBUS LEFT BEHIND

When Christopher Columbus first set foot on the tiny 27-square-mile island of Guanaja in 1502, he may have thought he was dreaming. Jutting skyward 1,600 feet from the sapphire blue Caribbean Sea, the island appeared like a multi-faceted emerald laced with crystalline waterfalls, exotic flowers, colorful birds and lush vegetation. Perhaps the island's most astonishing distinction is its perpetual supply of pure mountain spring water — the lack of which is the bane of most islands. Had he realized his vision was reality, he would have surely unpacked the hammocks, taken early retirement and called it "home." After all, it was his *last* New World voyage. Instead, the ambitious Italian paused

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only briefly before sailing southward to expand his real estate portfolio on behalf of his Spanish investors.

Ironically, the voyage was re-created nearly five centuries later by two explorers incarnate who charted the same Central American waters. But unlike their predecessor, they knew they had found Utopia.

Posada del Sol was the vision of Canadian billionaire David Gillespie. In 1980 he carved a spectacular 16-room, \$6.5 million private hotel into the island's lush oceanfront mountain-side, replete with Spanish tile, rich mahogany, white onyx and marble. For a while, Gillespie's Xanadu was a well-kept secret.

Then diving the island's waters in 1984, retired 30-year commercial diving specialist George Cundiff stumbled upon the Inn of the Sun. For him, the diamond in the rough was one he envisioned burnishing to a luster. It would become *the* ultimate luxury resort.

A lone grounds keeper was asked to relay to the owner Cundiff's pie-in-the-sky offer to purchase the property. A year later Gillespie called. Six days after that Cundiff and partner John G. McMillian owned a piece of heaven. Following exhaustive renovations, including the addition of eight guest rooms, Posada del Sol opened for business.

Cundiff wasted no time enlisting government assistance to declare the island and its waters a national park. Two Honduran presidents and several years later, Parque Nacional Marino was on the books. Guanaja now enjoys its status as a national conservation area, ensuring preservation of the island's unspoiled resources for generations to come.

The luxury villa resort was expanded to accommodate up to 50 guests. An equal number of staff ensures personalized attention. Although the temptation of further ex-

pansion might entice the average entrepreneur, Cundiff is a staunch believer in less is more and says expansion is complete.

Guest accommodations are enchanting—poolside, oceanfront and hillside bungalows with private terraces all offer breathtaking Caribbean views. Fresh island flowers are delivered daily to each villa. The only reminders of civilization are the fresh water swimming pool, lighted tennis court and private beach. An exotic poolside bar is lavishly surrounded by colorful tropical plants, rare orchids and jade-green hummingbirds—fast-becoming a trademark “wildlife” attraction among Posada's guests.

Thanks to 10 full-time gardeners, Posada's immaculate grounds are a botanical wonderland. More than 200 varieties of orchids and flowering plants scent the air and paint the landscape. Paradise *does* come in many colors—some of which may exist only here!

And what would paradise be without great food? Sumptuous meals are prepared daily under the watchful eye of Levent “Chuck” Cakici, formerly corporate director for Sheraton Hotels and manager of the Palm Beach Biltmore. The 30-year industry veteran is maestro to the resort's two culinary institute-trained chefs. Meals are distinctively Caribbean with subtle Central American and Mediterranean flavorings: coconut grouper, grilled wahoo served with cilantro butter, shrimp Carib, curried pork with coconut and mango chutney, black bottom silk snapper and creamy sweet mango pudding. Beef, pork and chicken are scrupulously selected and shipped from the mainland. Bread is baked fresh daily.

The resort's handsome wait staff is top flight, not to mention talented. With attentive panache, they appear to choreograph the delivery of the three-course noon and evening meals. Service more closely resembles a

ENCHANTING GUEST ACCOMMODATIONS OFFER BREATHTAKING CARIBBEAN VIEWS



graceful dance than an occupation. Patrons dine beneath poolside umbrellas — to deflect falling mangos — or in the ornately designed open-air dining room.

A

lthough stargazing and daydreaming *are* legitimate sports at Posada del Sol, the island's warm, abundant waters offer a bounty of recreation. Guanaja is surrounded by the world's second largest barrier reef and has been rated among the top four scuba diving areas in the world. The island's waters are home to 64 of the 67 different types of hard corals found in the Western Hemisphere, making for a thrilling kaleidoscopic panorama. Shallow underwater caves and grottos teem with an unending variety of fish. They spill out over a breathtaking coral wall that slopes downward 6,000 feet.

THERE'S GOLD IN THEM THAR HILLS!

Just 35 miles south of Guanaja, the mainland harbor of Trujillo was the Central American shipping hub during the 1600 and 1700s. There, galleons were loaded with gold, silver and precious stones for their voyage to Spain.

Guanaja's unusual elevation gave curious pirates an ideal vantage point to spot and intercept the slow, cargo-laden vessels. It is reputed that some 200 sunken ships lay in the surrounding waters — an unknown number of which have been salvaged. Sporadic discoveries of old rum bottles, pottery shards and the like fuel rumors that Guanaja is home to the buried booty!

Adding to the excitement, six ships lay in the surrounding waters. The growth of coral and algae attracts small fish and invertebrates, which in turn attracts larger fish. Much like an underwater convenience store, these ships bustle with marine activity 24 hours a day — including curious divers!

Four 42-foot custom dive boats offer plenty of room and rarely carry more than 14 divers per trip. PADI, NAUI and PDIC certification courses are available for those who want to test the waters. The island's abundance of shallow reefs are excellent for snorkeling as well.

Guanaja's diving is rivaled only by its world-class light tackle and deep sea fishing. Island waters abound with marlin, tarpon, king mackerel, sail fish, yellowtail, snapper, grouper, wahoo, bone and permit.

In addition to world-class diving, snorkeling and fishing, guests enjoy scheduled afternoon and evening activities: hiking on marked trails, visits to 2,000 year-old Indian ruins, waterfalls, sunset cruises and, or course, limbo.

It's no surprise that Posada del Sol's lush grounds are chosen by many couples to exchange "I dos." Where better to tie the knot than paradise? In addition to standard first-class service, honeymoon and anniversary packages are custom-designed with romance and privacy in mind. After al fresco breakfasting, couples can be whisked off by private boat to any one of the many nearby deserted islands for a day of play, rest and romance — complete with gourmet picnic lunch and two-way radio to hail a water taxi back to the resort.

Nearly a decade has passed since Cundiff's vision was born — creating a Shangri-la that guests claim is unparalleled.

From the ultimate executive retreat to a water-lover's playground to a honeymooner's haven, Posada del Sol is the ultimate sanctuary — where dreams of yet undiscovered emeralds in the sea come true. ■

For information and reservations, call the Posada's ticketing office at: 1-800-642-3483 or 407-624-3483 or write: 1201 U.S. Highway 1, Suite 220, North Palm Beach, FL 33408.



TRANSPORTATION:

Direct international flights to the Honduran mainland cities of San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa are available from Houston, New Orleans and Miami via American, Continental, Sahsa, LACSA and Taca airlines. From there, Islena airlines makes the 45-minute flight to Guanaja. An additional access point is now available thanks to a new 7,000-foot airstrip on neighboring Roatan, which accommodates direct U.S. flights. From there, an Islena charter connects passengers to nearby Guanaja.

WEATHER:

Gentle trade winds keep air and water temperatures between 76 and 81 degrees year round. During the rainy season (May through November) expect a brief afternoon rainfall.

CURRENCY:

The Honduran monetary unit is the lempira, five of which equal a U.S. dollar. Most major credit cards are accepted but be sure to ask before making a purchase.

GUANAJA IS
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