

ForbesLife

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**HIDDEN
HIMALAYAS**

**JAPAN'S
SUBLIME
RYOKANS**

**THE
HAMPTONS
OF SHANGHAI**

Plus
**WORLD'S BEST
NEW HOTELS**

**GATES TO
ASIA**

ESCAPES



Brush Creek Ranch, Saratoga, Wyoming

When hotel developer Bruce White bought his working cattle ranch in late 2008, its 19th-century homestead buildings were in sorry shape. Nearly three years and unrevealed millions of dollars later, his labor of love is set to compete with the West's cushiest four-season guest ranches. The original structures were carefully restored, and the new cabins and main lodge lavishly done up with antler chandeliers, furry barstools, plaid sofas, and a great deal of leather. Enthusiastic young guides lead horseback-riding, hiking,

Above: The renovated, historic Kinta's Cabin at Brush Creek Ranch.

Below: The plantation house at St. Regis Bahia Beach.

biking, fly-fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, and other expeditions, and there are welcome surprises like a full-size indoor basketball court, good live music in the saloon, and a killer massage in the spa.

The ranch sprawls over 13,000 acres, with many guests housed in freestanding cabins and two- or three-bedroom "residences" with tremendous views and the solitude that draws city folk to the mountains. Most of the guest quarters are miles away from the main compound. (Book one of the 13 lodge rooms or a Rendezvous Camp cabin if you don't want to drive everywhere.) There are 39 accommodations in total, with room for 145 people—especially people who know each other, as the ranch caters to corporate and family groups.

The grub is abundant and hearty (and included in the rates), but don't expect fine dining or polished service. Meals are buffet or family-style, and often served in an open-air "chuck wagon" where guests huddled under heat lamps in mid-June. But you didn't come to eat; you came to play. Paintball, anyone? —A.A.

➔ \$1,320–\$6,600, inclusive. 307-327-5284, brushcreekranch.com

St. Regis Bahia Beach, Puerto Rico

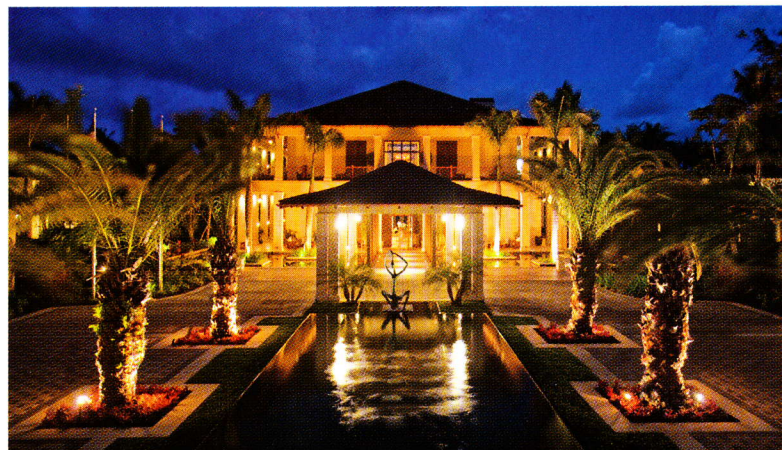
You can't get much farther away much closer. St. Regis Bahia Beach Resort is 35 minutes from the San Juan airport but in another world. The hotel is tucked into a corner of a jungly 483-acre property that spills down from the El Yunque Rainforest National Park to almost 2 miles of private beach, with miles of hiking/biking trails and acres of waterways in between. Although the development of this former coconut plantation is essentially a luxury real estate play—Oscar de la Hoya and Carlos Beltran are among the homeowners—the St. Regis occupies a privileged site, squarely on the beach with plenty of elbow room for itself despite a relatively modest 139 accommodations. It also basks in the developers' authentic commitment to the surroundings.

That came through loud and clear on my tour with Marcela Cañon, one of two marine biologists serving as staff naturalists. We golf-carted about, spying American coots and moorhens and pied-billed grebes and a spectacular black-crowned night heron. ("I'm reporting that one on ebird.com!" she said.)

The urban-centric will be comforted by the Remède Spa, a whole Bali-esque private world with walkways between koi ponds, and by Fern, the signature restaurant from the ubiquitous Jean-Georges Vongerichten. Perched on a veranda fronting the ocean across a lawn as tightly clipped as a bowling green, it is a soothing place to relax into a fine, if not-too-palate-challenging, tasting menu when the jalousies are raised to welcome the evening breeze. (And a stone bargain at \$90 for five courses with wine pairings.)

The off-property activities were not a highlight when we visited. But really, why leave the resort, with its natural wonders; array of sports; Robert Trent Jones Jr. golf course; big, comfortable rooms; broad beaches; and seductive pool complex? And special mention: Iguana Kids' Club. Our 3-year-old, often incomprehensible to us, was perfectly understood by the staff. Arriving back in our room, we discovered he'd arranged for postclub snacks and a video game installation. "Lucky Charms and Wii," he informed us. "That's what I'm talking about!" —RICHARD NALLEY

➔ \$929–\$2,350. 877-STREGIS, stregisbahiaibeach.com



PHOTOGRAPH: DAN HAM PHOTOGRAPHY (BRUSH CREEK)