



My daughter Breanna asked me at a very young age (my memory grows less reliable by the day, but I believe she was 5 at the time) if I knew what heaven looked like. For obvious reasons I had to explain to her that heaven was one destination I had no information on, except in my own imagination.

One personality trait that Breanna inherited from me is asking a difficult question and demanding a satisfying answer. It was no wonder I grew up to become a TV news reporter and later moved into newspaper publishing. I think that asking probing questions is simply a part of my genetic make-up. When you are an adult, the key is to know when and how to ask. When you are a young child those same rules do not apply; children simply ask.

Wanting to answer my daughter's question eloquently, I took a brief moment to contemplate my response. I will never forget her big brown eyes peering into mine as she waited for the words to leap off my lips. My answer was brief, "Heaven to me sweetheart would look like Candyland. The aroma of the air would be sweet, and everyone there would be sitting on pink cotton candy clouds eating none other than my favorite food of choice—candy!" My short description was enough to satisfy Breanna's curiosity at that particular moment in time. It was a very memorable moment because I knew she was starting to understand the concept that no one lives forever. A destination full of candy to my daughter (and me, for that matter), sounded quite sweet at the time.

Still in the profession of Q & A, I am fortunate to be reporting now on the happy topic of travel and this past August I experienced a location and property that simply took my breath away. It truly felt like a piece of heaven on earth. The country was Puerto Rico and the property location was Dorado Beach. This resort and country club has a very rich history and an enduring peaceful and serene feel to it.

During the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th this tranquil stretch of land was a pineapple and grapefruit plantation. In 1955, Laurence Rockefeller purchased the stunning grounds and built a spectacular 1,000-acre oceanfront resort. Back in the day, this was an exclusive getaway for presidents, dignitaries and Hollywood's A+ list. It was no surprise to discover that the distinguished Hyatt Corporation eventually took notice and has since carefully preserved this world-class resort famed for its tranquility and privacy.

The Hyatt Dorado Beach is situated along one of Puerto Rico's finest shorelines and is the Caribbean's only boutique resort offering endless amenities of a resort twice its size. It is nestled into the tropical foliage directly on the ocean, giving the guest a feeling of seclusion and safety. The architecture and landscaping were designed to completely blend into the environment, hence you will find no building taller than the tallest palm tree within the property. The word Dorado means "golden" and it suits this area of the seashore perfectly. In the morning, the sun hits the sand in such a way to give it the appearance of a perfectly golden hue.

Beyond the beauty of nature that surrounds the resort, it is the simple, yet elegant touches that make this oasis so different. I walked into my room and sensed something special about my quarters. Fresh flowers adorned all the towels in the bathroom and the breathtaking view of the sea from my bedroom was, well what I would best describe as heavenly.

I encountered staff that had been working on the grounds for over 40 years! Their love and dedication to the Dorado is evident at every turn. It is no secret why there are generations of families that come back yearly to this resort. It is tranquility at its finest and there are endless activities to take part in if relaxation is not everyone's cup of tea.

This place is brimming with things to do and family fun truly is the number one priority. With 1,000 lush tropical acres no one will be left with the question of what to do in a day. 85% of the

guest rooms open up directly to the beach. The perfectly situated lagoons provide a safe space for children. If fresh water is preferred over the salt there are numerous swimming pools and the world famous 1,178 foot long winding fresh water river pool.

Camp Hyatt is one of the more impressive family programs I have encountered on my travels. Children ages 3 -12 will enjoy daily activities that have been carefully designed by local organizations such as the Puerto Rican Institute of Culture; the Departments of Education and Agriculture; and the National Forest Service. Children have the wonderful opportunity to learn about Puerto Rico's rich culture through play.

The Dorado has also earned top bragging rights for their golf guests, offering four 18-hole championship golf courses all designed by none other than Robert Trent Jones, Sr. Puerto Rican born golf great Chi Chi Rodriguez has a palatial home within the beautiful property grounds. The East and West courses rank with the great seaside links of the world, winding through tropical forests and citrus groves along the Atlantic Ocean, past a chain of lakes and a man-made lagoon. Golf enthusiasts will not be disappointed!

As a destination for other sports lovers, the tennis programs are also worth boasting about. Peter Burwash International (PBI) is behind the Dorado's first-class tennis instruction. I learned a more powerful serve and forehand topspin in two hours of instruction there than I have in all my private lessons back home. Their pros rotate, but they are all top notch. PBI's philosophy is to teach individuals, not systems. Their programs are in over 100 countries and I will vouch for them in Puerto Rico. I was truly amazed with how Adam, my instructor was able to improve my game so quickly (and just in time for Fall Tennis USTA league)!

With all the activities you and your family will be doing, there is no shortage of wonderful food to fuel you. There are seven restaurants throughout the Dorado and one is more unique than the next. You can feel the energy of the past filtering through the walls in these dining areas. The Su Casa Restaurant, a former 1928 hacienda plantation home overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, serves delicious Spanish and Puerto Rican gourmet traditional meals. I had my first taste of apio, a medicinal celery root that puts our mashed Idaho Potato to shame. Pasta de Guayaba con Queso Blanco is another local favorite. This tasty white cheese and guava paste is as popular as our PB & J sandwich. The superb preparation the chef's show off throughout these dining destinations will keep your taste buds begging for more. Puerto Rican food is exceptional! These delicious local dishes offer a culinary fusion of Spanish, African and Taino influences.

My trip would not have been complete without a tropical spa treatment at the resort Spa del Sol. The creator behind the treatments, Lizmayra, grew up on a coffee plantation and took years of her family's rituals and incorporated

them into her special spa options. With 80+ treatments to choose from, using over 30 native fruit/coffee and plant varieties, I narrowed it down to two unbelievable choices, My first treatment was a Double Espresso Coffee Body Polish. Who would have thought that Puerto Rican ground coffee is a stimulating exfoliant that contains astringent, anti oxidants and cleansing properties that help clean impurities from the body. Last but not least, I surrendered to a Detox-Thalasso Seaweed Wrap that also used a natural ingredient indigenous to the area. I floated back to my room after the session.

Another aspect that was key to Dorado Beach was the ease of venturing out for the day if you choose to leave the resort. An absolute must is to take advantage of the resort's Concierge service, which will set everything up for your day excursions. I spent an afternoon tooling around the town of Old San Juan. It was easy to get lost in time in this very historical city. Most of the streets and buildings are originals and the architecture is widely varied in design. With countless restaurants and shops galore, the day flew by for me. There are also attractions to take in such as the fortress of El Morro and flea markets that will impress even the savviest shopper.

I am sure most parents will agree with me that family vacationing can be exhausting and not usually hassle free. My long weekend at the Hyatt Dorado Beach was sheer relaxation and rejuvenation. I awoke my first morning a bit startled and unnerved. Why you may ask? I had slept so soundly in my room with the sound of the ocean and light methodical chirping of the Coqui frogs outside my sliding door, that for the first time that I can remember since pre-parenthood, I actually slept uninterrupted through the entire night. As we all know my precious *Family Times* readers – that is unheard of during our parenting years!

So now, when I consider it, if Breanna were to ask me again, the mixture of glorious weather, soothing sounds and unlimited comfort inside the grounds of the Hyatt Dorado Beach would be my updated description of what the ultimate slice of heaven (on earth) would look like.

