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Conversations with a food show host and travel founder

[FULL BIO](#) ✓

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The stretchy, squishy yet undeniably scarce thing that is time. While planning trips for [Journy](#) travelers, I've realized just how much people have wildly different preferences of how they spend their time while on a trip —what they're willing to wait for (or pay to not), whether they want to pack it all in...or wander leisurely.

My perception of time—of fun and boredom, productivity and downtime, has changed with age and throughout several careers.

I used to think that I was go-go-go. How could people ever sit on a beach and just do nothing. As a high-energy kid, I used to wonder why grownups were always so tired that they didn't want to do things with me?

My oh my, have I turned into that boring adult. Now, with a calendar jam-packed with meetings, travel and expectations, doing mostly nothing is all I want to do. Joy lies in that found blank white negative space on the Google Calendar grid of My Life.



Those questions about being stranded on a desert island revolved around scarcity and desperation. But I'm like: That actually sounds nice. Secretly, we know we all could use throw away some things we don't need, cut out time spent on people and not-really-priorities that don't serve us. A real vacation. While work-cations are great, I needed a break.

The closest thing to shipping myself off to a desert island I've done lately is head to Tortuga Bay Puntacana Resort solo to be completely, unabashedly looked after.

This entrepreneur believes, maybe maniacally, that she can build two companies and have time to go on (underwhelming) New York City dates, get regular(hip hop yoga) exercise and still remember to call Mom.

So, when I can, I just want to shut up with a podcast by the pool. The question remains—how fast can I get there?

Most warm-weather destinations, you land, go through the whole customs and baggage rigamarole and then finally get on your way down an often bumpy, dusty road hours away to where you're staying. Not at the 13-villa Oscar de la Renta designed Tortuga Bay Puntacana Resort & Club, recently renovated by Markham Roberts.

Once landing at the privately-owned Punta Cana International airport (that feels almost expressly there to service this bunch of resorts), you're immediately whisked from runway to customs via personal golf cart. You're greeted by an official escort who's thrilled to shepherd you past the hoi polloi into the line marked "Dominican Nationals" which ends up at a window for "VIPs" (why, hello).

It's a dream of an airport experience for somebody who's x-rayed and patted down all too much.

Our driver Camacho greeted us with an important question for the ride from the airport to hotel check-in: "Would you like a beer or a water?" He pulled out both for me from an ice-cold cooler. My first moments in the Dominican Republic and I'm double-fisting for the win already.

I calculated the amount of time this took. From airplane door across the runway to car transfer: Eight minutes.

Drive from airport to hotel: Six minutes.

Not enough time to finish my beer. No hands for my luggage. I'm greeted with "You're on vacation. We can do everything for you."



Tortuga Bay Puntacana was built by the visionary Dominican hotelier Frank Rainieri who started out in 1971 with 10 small bungalows. De la Renta fell in love with the area in the early 90's after he met Rainieri and wanted to get involved with this new property. He then called his best friend, singer and songwriter Julio Iglesias and told him that it was time for them to live next to each other—and that he had found the perfect place for it, here with its (at the time) untouched beaches.

At \$800-\$1,200 per night, the Tortuga Bay Puntacana Resort & Club is the most luxurious of the Punta Cana compound of hotels, restaurants, recreational facilities, shopping centers and private beaches. (Whoever was in charge made the questionably call to name this one resort 'Puntacana' in order to differentiate the ultra-luxury from the rest of the area of 'Punta Cana'—impossibly confusing, I know. But it needed to be mentioned lest you think my article is riddled with inconsistent spelling errors.)



Once you're there, transportation via car or golf cart across the sprawling grounds, from Tortuga Bay to the other properties, is included. Guests not staying at the Tortuga Bay but at the other area hotels may purchase the VIP airport service.

The privately-owned airport PUJ airport is a hugely profitable piece of the Punta Cana development; they service 7 million passengers a year, and it's one of the most accessible airports in the Caribbean.

It gets better. Imagine an airport pool overlooking the runways. Why not? Speaking of time spent, turn your wait into an extension of your vacation. Earlier this year, the airport opened up just that in Terminal B, where you can soak up the last of the sunshine with complimentary snacks, drinks and front-row view of arrivals and departures. Fly major carriers Delta and American out of this terminal in order to be able to enjoy this perk.

When you're not living your best life at the airport, you can visit the Ojos Ecological Reserve with two swimmable lagoons, enjoy their 27-hole golf course, visit the on-property bees, go horseback riding, learn kitesurfing, a recent new pursuit of mine—the winds were consistently strong.

While there, I went for a massage (there's a Six Senses Spa—essential), wine tasting (basic with standard international pours but offered with warm island hospitality) and a more locally-inspired pairing session of all-Dominican chocolate, rum and handmade cigars. As an adamant non-smoker, I'm only just getting started on cigars. But as the night went on, I could feel myself settling in and turning into the pampered, old man recluse I really am inside.

While I was content to just sit and stare off into the turquoise Caribbean, the next morning, I decided to sign up for a tennis lesson, as they assured me the instructors were very good.

I made sure they knew how much of a total beginner I am. After a particularly harrowing experience being taught tennis by a state-ranked tennis player former boyfriend (we were going down the drain by that point in the relationship), I've been convinced that tennis isn't my sport. But isn't being away from home an opportunity for the reinvention of oneself? The facilities sounded pretty impressive (all of the courts to choose from—cement! clay! grass!), so tennis it was.

My instructor Felix de los Santos had hit doubles with de la Renta. Talk about an upgrade from the former boyfriend—I felt that his magic might be squandered on me, as he's also played with celebrities the likes of tennis star Tommy Robredo to ballet dancer Robert Twesley to Queen Mathilde of Belgium to Vogue editor Anna Wintour. He was extremely patient (no PTSD here), and encouraged me to “follow through!” I left feeling surprisingly competent.



And famished. The main restaurant Bamboo offered an indulgent breakfast spread with a DIY juicer (lifesaver) and some nontraditional options like sushi and soup. Lunch, I loved a stellar gazpacho, Dominican goat stew or simply prepared local dorade.

The crowd when I was there was mostly parents with their kids, which the staff so doted on, plus retirees. It's perfect for families. I could see myself here with my future young children all decked out in the latest mini-me resort wear with the handsome love of my life. But for now, the staff looked quizzically at me when I repeated that no, there would be nobody joining at my table for lunch.

While the poolside bar was bustling on a Wednesday night, it wasn't exactly the 30-something singles scene of my wildest dreams. But who needs a man (or a woman) when the resort staff surprises you post-dinnertime with a drawn bath surrounded by candles and bougainvillea?

Valentine's Day for one, better late than never!

Besides, there's something so delightful about having that whole four-poster bed all to yourself. Even fully sprawling starfished, only one side of the bed gets mussed up at a time. So I relish climbing into one side for my afternoon nap and then the other side at night.



I promptly scooted into the already bubble-filled jumbo tub and, with zero downtime, was meditating on plans for world domination. My business partner accidentally dials me on FaceTime in video mode and laughs, “Of course you’d be in a bath, surrounded by flower petals.” I’m only a little bit sheepish.

I combined the longest bath ever with this productive conference call. With the iPhone now water-resistance, the bathroom is the new corner office, complete with massage jets and oceanfront view.

My hotelier friend Mauro once told me that the hotel experience shouldn’t “*be* just like home” (my Manhattan ‘home’ lacks a tub for two)—it’s that it should “*feel* just like home.”

What’s more like home than a bath that you didn’t have to premeditate or even wait for the tub to fill up? I fell asleep immediately, better than home, with the big white shutters open for the breeze on my skin.