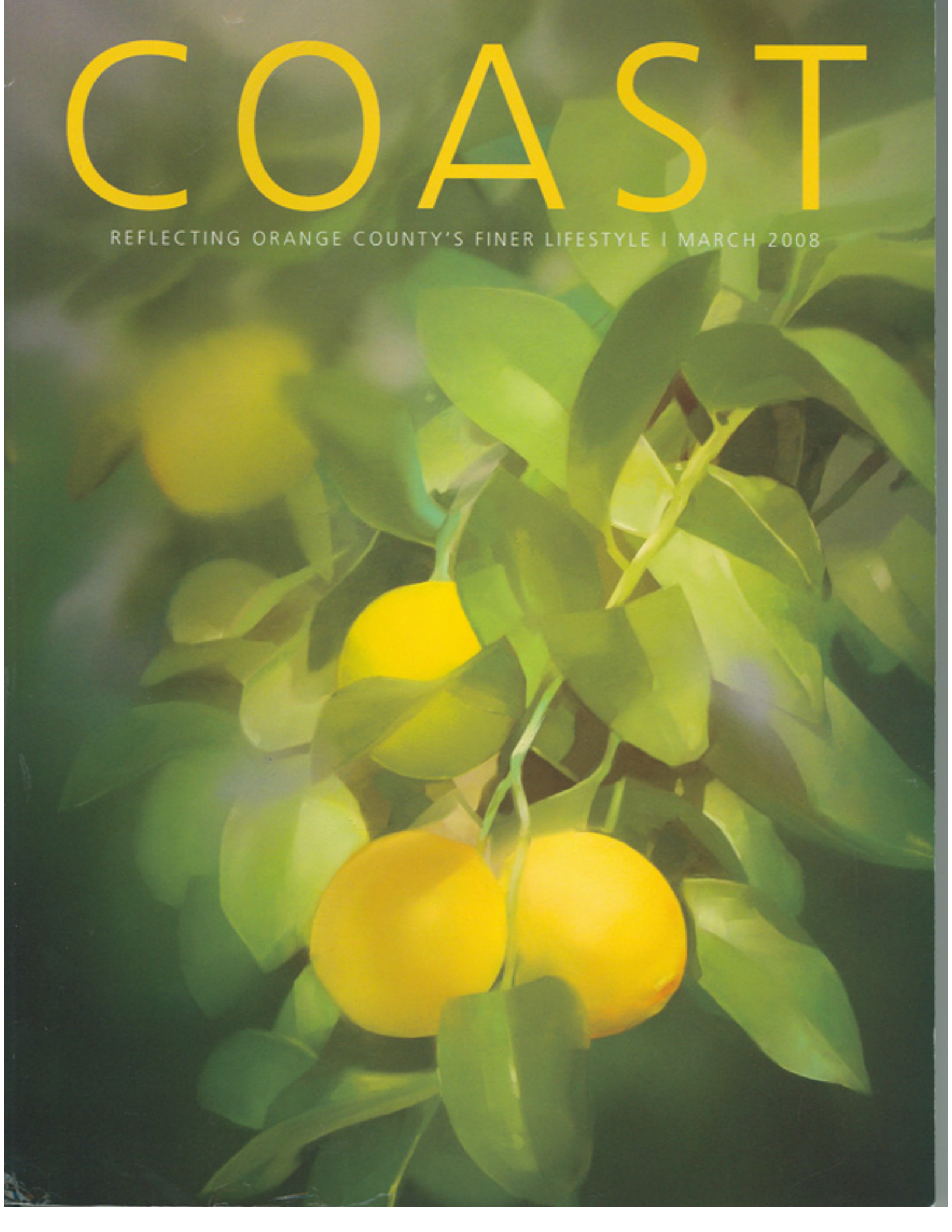


COAST

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TRAVEL >

hot hideaway

Punta Mita's Four Seasons Resort and
Private Residence Villas crank up the thermostat on cool

BY JUSTINE AMODEO



"You're crazy," my friend Susan says when I announce I'm headed to Mexico in July. • I send her the following text from the oceanview plunge pool at a Private Residence villa at the Four Seasons Punta Mita:

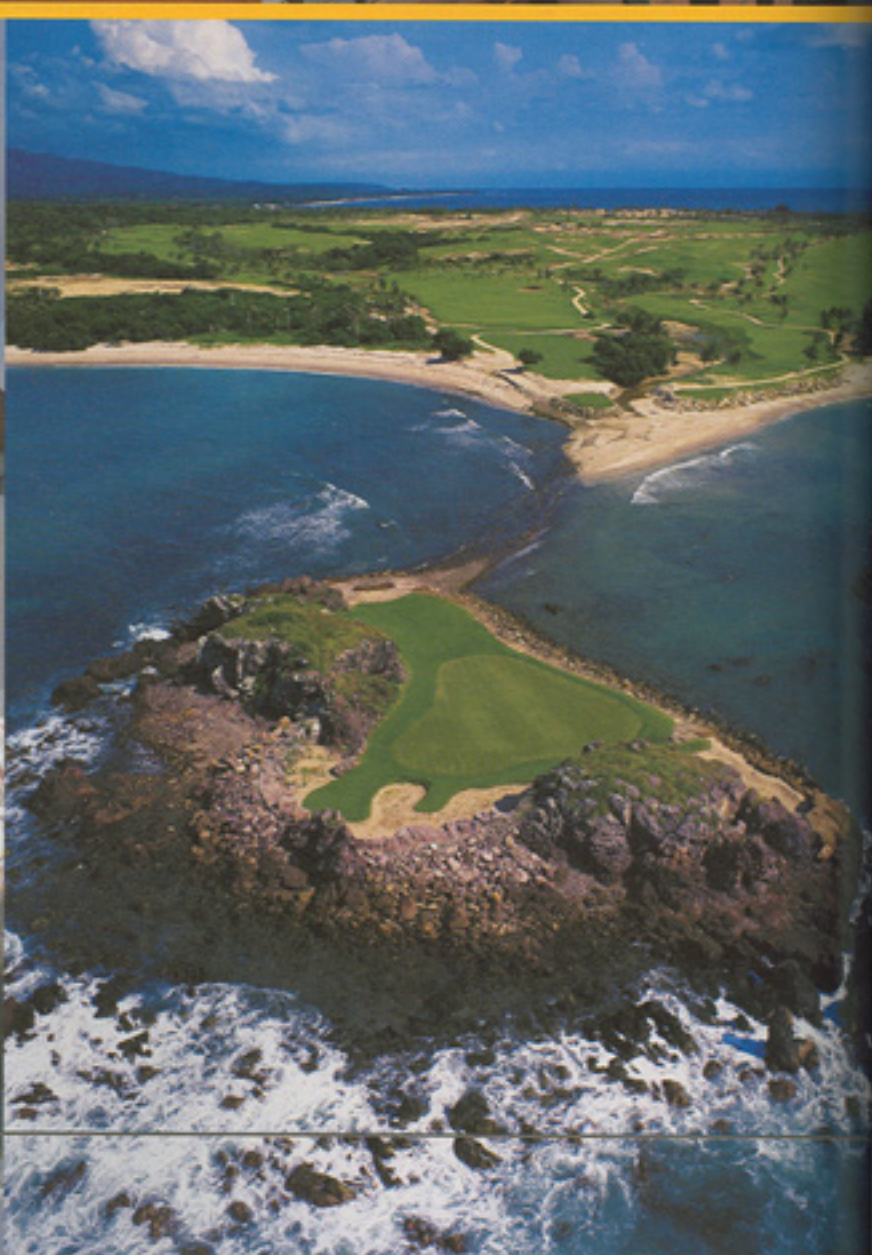
so commit me. bilingual houseman inside (air conditioned) villa, playing cards with our daughter. son on playstation in fully staffed (air conditioned) nunnuszi game room. overlooking ocean (swimming banned, i'll admit, due to proliferation of jellyfish) with an icy cold margarita in one hand, fresh ceviche in a bowl on the ledge. bead of sweat rolled down my forehead minutes ago. houseman spritzed it away with bottle of evian. blood red crabs, fireflies and pyrotechnic sunsets all around. how's your day going? J.

I didn't tell her the golf cart was about to pick me up to deliver me to the state-of-the-art Apuane spa at the resort below for a Hakali massage that involved an application with cactus paddles of a warm meringue made of cactus, *tuna* (the blossom of the cactus), and *pulque*, a fermented beverage made from Agave juice. Or about the private chef who would be arriving later to cook us a gourmet meal. Because no matter how high Mother Nature has turned up her thermostat, a private residence villa at the Four Seasons Punta Mita is the coolest new vacation option available on this spear-shaped peninsula, just 45 minutes from Puerto Vallarta.

This 1,500-acre master planned luxury resort

and residential community is currently home to the Four Seasons Punta Mita Resort, various residential villas, townhomes and condominiums, a Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course (with an island hole), a St. Regis Resort & Residences, and soon, a second Jack Nicklaus course and the La Solana Resort, expected to open in 2009. But for vacationers looking for second homes or homes to rent, the Four Seasons' four- and five-bedroom Private Residence villas are a luxurious option for families looking for an unforgettable getaway. A unique rental opportunity available through the resort, these individually owned homes are secluded in a private neighborhood only moments from the first tee of the resort's golf course and are sup-

Outdoor patios with private plunge pools surround the spacious private residence villas at the Four Seasons Punta Mita. Crabs, lizards, and exotic birds coexist with guests at this 1,500 acre resort and community.



OPPOSITE The entryway to the private residence villa with its hammocks and outdoor fire; Bahia's beachfront view; The resort's island hole is a challenge at high tide. Bahia's chef greets local fishermen to offer guests catches of the day. **RIGHT** The villa's spectacular master bedroom with private patio. A private jacuzzi at sunset.

ported by the fine amenities and exemplary personal service of the resort.

The spacious living quarters of our spectacular, close-to-7,000-square-foot, four-bedroom hillside villa are filled with paintings, sculpture and furnishings from local artisans in contemporary Mexican coastal style. The fully equipped gourmet kitchen is open to the living room, with sliding doors that reveal a large, private terrace with an infinity-edge plunge pool, hot tub and outdoor dining area that overlooks the Pacific. Dreamy bedrooms have ocean views and private terraces, the master with its own heavenly outdoor shower. The entry terrace is intricately designed to connect the villa's various wings with an outdoor seating area, two hammocks and at night, stunning lighting.

It's hard to leave the space, but our private houseman, Bismark, who our children clearly adore as they ask if he can move back to California with us, encourages us to try the resort's new Bahía restaurant, nestled among giant manzanilla trees on the resort's Las Cuevas beach. This contemporary, right-on-the-sand grill offers an elegant venue with sleek, modern design and an outdoor wood-burning grill built into the rock that allows guests to watch the chef cooking up the freshest of ingredients. Three times a week, the chef greets a local fishing boat on the beach and selects the best offerings at both lunch and dinner, and decide the style of cooking. Bahía's menu features top-quality fresh seafood, meats and seasonal vegetables served in simple, grilled presentations. A variety of signature sauces, starches and side items is available to complement the grilled items. We tried the homemade salmon gravlax with tequila marinated salmon, which was served with a house-infused hibiscus flower aquavit (and whoa was it strong!), the organic mixed greens and watermelon salad, with pistachio and goat cheese cobbler and passion fruit dressing, some Bahía shrimp ceviche – shrimp, organic lemon balm, salmon roe and citrus granite – from the raw bar, and from the wood-burning grill, the filet mignon, which was served with four different sauces. Sides available include everything from bok choy to baked potatoes.

At the resort's adults only Tamai pool bar, a remarkable tapas and sushi menu is available from 5-7:30 p.m. that allows guests to savor small bites of items such as lime marinated snapper with wakame salad and sushi



kid stuff

Nunutzi Games Room, named after the Huichol word for child or youth, is a 2,400-square-foot facility open to guests year-round on a complimentary basis.

Staffed by a team of employees skilled at working with youth, Nunutzi is a safe – and fun – venue for people of all ages (and open until 10:30 p.m.!).

Featured in Nunutzi are eight PlayStation and GameCube consoles on 30-inch monitors, as well as a card table and ping-pong, pool, air hockey and foosball tables. A 60-inch television is arranged in a theater setting. The Games Room also has a separate glassed-in room with a pool table, ideal for tournaments or parents who want to use the table. Complimentary snacks are available throughout the day and evening, with an emphasis on healthy selections, including pretzels and fresh local fruit. Healthy drinks are also featured – unlimited, unsweetened drinks (such as the popular hibiscus drink) are always on hand.

For younger children aged 5-12, the resort's complimentary Kids For All Seasons program is a fabulous way for children to spend their day. Housed in a separate building, it features a playroom for activities and an outdoor playground with jungle gym and wading pool. The professionally supervised program provides numerous entertaining activities designed to take advantage of Punta Mita's natural environment, including making Mexican art, collecting shells on the beach, hiking, playing at the beach, and when we were there, a joyful Macarena contest.

OPPOSITE Indoor outdoor living is a way of life at Punta Mita, whether you are relaxing on your own private outdoor patio or in your private residence villa living room.

rolls wrapped around ingredients such as green cardamom and tequila marinated salmon.

Aramara, another terraced restaurant at the resort, features "Chino Latino" cuisine – a melting pot of Latin American and Asian flavors and culinary styles.

Not deterred by the heat, we tore ourselves away from the villa a couple of times to go horseback riding through the thick jungle. Since the time of the Conquistadors, cowboys called *charros* have been deftly plying the region's hillsides on horseback, and in the company of these bilingual tour guides, riders can explore the dramatic landscape while receiving a history lesson on the area. Also on our itinerary was a visit to the charming bohemian fishing village of Sayulita, just a few miles outside the guarded gates. Locals and American and Canadian expatriots alike have joined together to offer water sports, tony boutiques and authentic dining experiences that reflect the colors and flavors of this quaint area of Mexico.

But back at the residence, Bismark and a chef are busy at work preparing yet another fine dining experience for our family. All rental guests throughout the entire development, which includes not just the Four Seasons Private Residence Villas but the uniquely designed Hacienda de Mita condos, Las Palmas de Punta Mita Villas, and Las Terrazas Golf Villas, have access to a residence concierge that handles everything from your grocery list to your daily trip itinerary, as well as access to the private Resident's Beach Club, where guests can lounge under palm-fringed palapas or relax on the soft white sand, cool off in an oceanfront swimming pool or a children's garden pool, and dine at a private restaurant. A staff houseman is onsite eight hours a day in all private home rentals to plan a day of sport fishing, whale watching, sea kayaking, zip lining across a private eco-reserve, or visiting the nearby Huichol Indian Village or the Marieta Island Marine Reserve. It is here visitors can encounter the rare blue-footed boobies, brown noddies and laughing gulls. Short of a jaunt to the Galapagos Islands, you don't get cooler than that.

Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita offers 173 guest rooms, including 30 suites, in tile-roofed Mexican-style casitas set along the Pacific Coast. Rates start at \$590 per night; www.fourseasons.com/puntamita. Four Seasons four to five bedroom Private Residence Villas range from \$3,115-\$10,600 per day, depending on the season. Call (888) 647-0979 for more information, or log onto www.puntamita.com.mx.

