



8, 2011

Check In/ Check Out

VIEQUES ISLAND, P.R.

W Retreat and Spa

THE BASICS

Vieques, a small island just off the eastern coast of Puerto Rico, has seen big changes in the last decade. Until 2003, most of its 52 square miles were occupied by the United States Navy, which used the base as a bombing range. Almost immediately after the military's withdrawal, travelers began flocking to this untamed paradise of turquoise waters and white powdered sand beaches. In a clear sign that Vieques is no longer off the radar, the first *W Retreat and Spa* in North America opened its doors there last March. The brand designed a sprawling property that's both luxurious and rustic, filled with unpolished wood and colorful details. It also manages to blend in with the lush nature that surrounds it.

LOCATION

Right on the beach, set on a low cliff with views of the Atlantic and nearby Culebra Island, the hotel is isolated, but everything in Vieques is a short drive away, including the quaint fishing village of Esperanza and the idyllic Bahía de la Chiva beach. Renting a car is recommended.

THE ROOM

My Spectacular room, as the *W* calls it, was 638 square feet and had big sliding windows facing the palm-studded pool area and the ocean. Patricia Urquiola, the hotel's designer, chose a palette of warm tones with splashes of red, fuchsia and aquamarine. One particularly attractive corner was occupied by a "chill chair," a round chaise longue strewn with bright pillows, with enough legroom for supine TV viewing. The queen beds proved to be ideal for this activity as well: their espresso-hued headboards were padded and ergonomically shaped. Useful features included an iPod docking station, a cordless phone and a sectional desk that partly rolled out to become a dining table.

THE BATHROOM

The bathroom's oversize, vintage-style steel bathtub and boxy sink were separated from the room by a see-through mesh curtain. It looked very cool but was totally lacking in privacy. The toilet had its own space, as did the rainfall shower, but their wood sliding doors never seemed to close properly.

AMENITIES

Amenities are a *W* forte, and here the chain fanned all its feathers. The 6,000-square-foot *Away Spa* had numerous treatment cabanas, a row of modern pedicure pods and a salon. My massage felt technically correct, but was not memorable. The best part came right afterward: an al fresco shower, to the sounds of native coqui frogs, on a private patio behind the cabana. Next to the spa was a well-equipped gym, open 24 hours, which faced a coffee shop, *MIX on the Beach*, the seafront restaurant, had a handsome layout dominated by a high communal table, and a menu created by Alain Ducasse. Everything I tried — including the \$16 oreochiette pasta with squash compote — was excellent and reasonably priced.



The colorful Living Room Lounge at the hotel.

ROOM SERVICE

In-room dining is available at all times. On my last day, I ordered a hamburger for lunch and explained that I was leaving for the airport in an hour. They predicted a 30-minute wait, but my food actually arrived sooner. The wedge-cut fries with spicy mayo were tasty; the burger was bland.

BOTTOM LINE

Aside from a few glitches in the service (a 25-minute wait for breakfast eggs, for example, and a delay at checkout), my stay was thoroughly pleasant. The *W Vieques* has become a destination in itself, but if visitors fail to leave this stylish cocoon, they are missing world-class diving and snorkeling, authentic bars, a bioluminescent bay and at least a dozen secluded beaches. Doubles start at \$379 in low season; \$389 in high season. *W Retreat and Spa* — Vieques Island, State Road 200, Km. 3.2; (787) 741-4100; wvieques.com. **RADLA SINGER**