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HEALTHY HOTELS:
TAKE A VACATION
FROM ALLERGIES

A Breath of Fresh Air

The newest amenity in Caribbean hotels?
An allergy-friendly room.



Allergy symptoms themselves weren't all that bothered Sandra Kofsky on her annual trips to Aruba. After a stay at a hotel there brought on difficulty breathing, side effects began to interfere with her island R&R.

"There's a terrible anxiety associated with allergies, especially when you're traveling," says Kofsky, a resident of Newington, Connecticut, who has been visiting Aruba for more than 20 years.

"I always wished I could look forward to my hotel room," she adds, "instead of worrying about what was lurking inside." Now, thanks to new innovations sweeping through Caribbean hotels, Kofsky is leaving her allergy medicine at home.

According to the National Institutes of Health, 35 million Americans

like Kofsky suffer from respiratory symptoms related to seasonal allergies. The Caribbean's consistently humid climate makes matters worse for travelers, creating a hospitable environment for mildew, mites and other moisture-related allergens. This state of affairs prompted properties such as the Casa del Mar Beach Resort,

near Aruba's Eagle Beach, to undergo a seven-step process to eliminate mold, dust, bacteria, pollen and other irritants in each of its guest rooms, as well as its gym, retail stores and meeting areas. The result: the Caribbean's first verifiably "allergy-friendly" hotel.

"The air in the rooms smelled fresh, and the mold that used to be under the bathroom sinks was gone," says Kofsky about a recent stay at the hotel, which completed the process last year. Best of all, she suffered no symptoms. "It was as if I were sitting in my own home."

Casa del Mar was the first of three Aruban resorts to hire Pure Solutions, a Cheektowaga, New York, company that has converted more than 1,000 hotel rooms in the United States, Asia, the Middle East and now the Caribbean into hypoallergenic "pure rooms." Through its patent-protected process, the company claims to eliminate the majority of allergens and more than 90 percent of mold. Technicians sanitize air ducts and fill them with a cartridge of tea tree oil, a natural disinfectant; chemically clean walls, ceilings and carpets; "shock" rooms with a four-hour dose of ozone to kill viruses; apply an antibacterial mist to all surfaces; cover mattresses and pillowcases with waterproof dust-mite protectors; and add FDA-approved air-filtration systems to each room. Once technicians complete the process, they monitor the rooms every 90 days.

Each room is then guaranteed allergy-friendly, a pledge from Pure Solutions that independent surveys corroborate. In a study conducted by the State University of New York at Buffalo, the Pure Solutions process reduced respirable particles, on average, from as many as 10 million per cubic foot to less than 600,000. In a guest survey conducted over five weeks at three Shangri-La hotels in China, Hong Kong and Singapore — all of which converted part of their inventory to pure rooms last year — more than 86 percent of respondents said that staying in a pure room enhanced their comfort.

"It's like working in a brand-new hotel," says Leonora Defoe, a housekeeper at Casa del Mar. "I used to use

Clorox bleach to clean black spots off the walls every day. Now I don't have to."

Two other Aruban properties, the Mill Resort & Suites and the Playa Linda Beach Resort, have converted about 20 percent of their inventory to pure rooms. Both aim to be completely allergen-free by 2010. And in a move that promises to influence other major hotel chains with a Caribbean presence, Wyndham Rio del Mar Resort & Spa in Puerto Rico and Wyndham Sugar Bay Resort on St. Thomas converted 10 percent of their rooms to pure rooms last summer, charging their guests \$20 to \$25 more per night to stay in them.

This is all good news for allergy sufferers, of course. But what if your favorite island doesn't yet have any hypoallergenic hotels? Experts recommend advance planning. "People with asthma and other allergies should make sure to bring extra medication and inhalants in case they have an attack or reaction," says Dr. Thomas A. E. Platts-Mills, former president of the American Academy of Allergy

Asthma & Immunology. Another trick: Request a smoke-free room on a high floor. "The higher you go, the less humid it is," Platts-Mills says. "It naturally decreases the buildup of mites and mold." — *David LaHuta*

NO TISSUES NEEDED

Stay in allergen-free rooms at these resort hotels:

CASA DEL MAR BEACH RESORT
Aruba (297) 582-7000
casadelmar-aruba.com

PLAYA LINDA BEACH RESORT
Aruba (297) 586-1000
playalinda.com

THE MILL RESORT Aruba
(297) 586-7700; millresort.com

WYNDHAM RIO MAR RESORT
Puerto Rico (877) 636-0636
wyndhamriomar.com

WYNDHAM SUGAR BAY RESORT
St. Thomas (340) 777-7100
wyndham.com



GOOD TO GO

ONE FOR THE ROAD

It's a common dilemma for those of us bringing home liquid souvenirs from the tropics — now that they're banned from our carry-ons, getting those exotic bottles of rum home intact has been a matter of wrapping them in laundry and hoping for the best. But now the **BOTTLE WISE DUO BAG** is here to help you overcome anxieties about liquor-soaked suitcases. The bag's detachable pouches fit snugly into checked luggage and provide padded passage for a 750-ml bottle. Pouches can be bought separately or snapped into their messenger-bag-like carrying case, which does double duty as a wine tote at home. The bag comes in both leather and nylon, in a variety of colors. From \$59 for the bag, \$22 for each pouch. 800-673-9770; bottlewise.com — *Becky Strauss*

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