The Latest in Luxury Resort Amenities: Worms

By Victor Ocasio  August 25, 2004

There were many things I enjoyed on our recent visit to Tortuga Bay at the PUNTACANA resort in the Dominican Republic. Our villa was pretty dope. The pool and grill were divine. I loved eating, dancing, kayaking, and stand-up paddle boarding. Even the spa treatment was nice, and only slightly weird. But the thing that sticks in my mind now that I look back on our visit from a few weeks distance: The worm.

Let me explain. PUNTACANA has a whole bunch of initiatives to save water and energy and basically just a big compost pile, where all the organic scraps the resort has - like the unripe fruit from our room's welcome fruit bowl - are taken. The worms love the stuff, and feast on it voraciously until they poop it all out.

And the worm poop? That's the soil. From paper scraps to garden soil in one easy step. I explored the compost pile with Ken, finding the worm and running the soil through my fingers. It didn't smell bad at all, and it wasn't sticky or gross, or was just dirt, nothing more. Ken explained that the worms also yield a valuable liquid - let's call it worm juice - that's collected and used as fertilizer for crops such as avocados, peppers, eggplant, tomatoes, and fruit trees. And the worm-poop soil is important because it provides a means to grow these crops, which would otherwise never flourish in the sandy ground so close to the ocean.

You are now wondering just how they separate the worms from the soil when they are coming to add it to the soil and start another batch. Or do they have to pick them out by hand, worm by worm? Nope. They do all screen the worm soil to the debris and lay down a thin row of fresh organic waste (banana peels and such) and the hungry worms come munching through. Not one worm remains in the soil (okay, maybe the really stupid ones do) where there's a new food source to devour.

I just don't see any losers in this equation. The resort saves money on garbage removal. The garden gets fertile soil in which to grow fresh produce to be used in nearby restaurants. And the worms have a job that they love. And I don't mention that I was right there in the shed, and I didn't smell bad at all? In fact, it didn't smell like anything, so this is definitely something you could put very close to rich, discerning guests, and they won't complain unless they're worm-hating twerps.

So, fancy resorts of the world, please follow PUNTACANA's lead and put some worms to work today. Kick up the marketing effort and make an eco-thing out of it. You've got nothing to lose but a few hundred dollars, waste a week.

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