

# LUXURY LIVING

NATIONAL POST  
FRIDAY  
OCTOBER 18, 2013



[nationalpost.com](http://nationalpost.com)

Find your home  
at [nationalpost.com/homes](http://nationalpost.com/homes)

## BUY IT

### WHERE TO LIVE

A luxury home to  
reflect your values  
and desires. *LL2,6*

## TRY IT

### OH, THAT'S RICH

Neither a buyer nor  
a hoarder be. Just  
rent it all! *LL4*

## ABIDE IT

### ETIQUETTE

How to interact in  
your new condo  
building. *LL9*

# THE VIEW FROM HERE

We've got  
penthouses, pools  
and posh pads for  
you, at home  
and away. Need  
savvy services  
to help ease  
your hectic lifestyle?  
We've got help  
for that, too

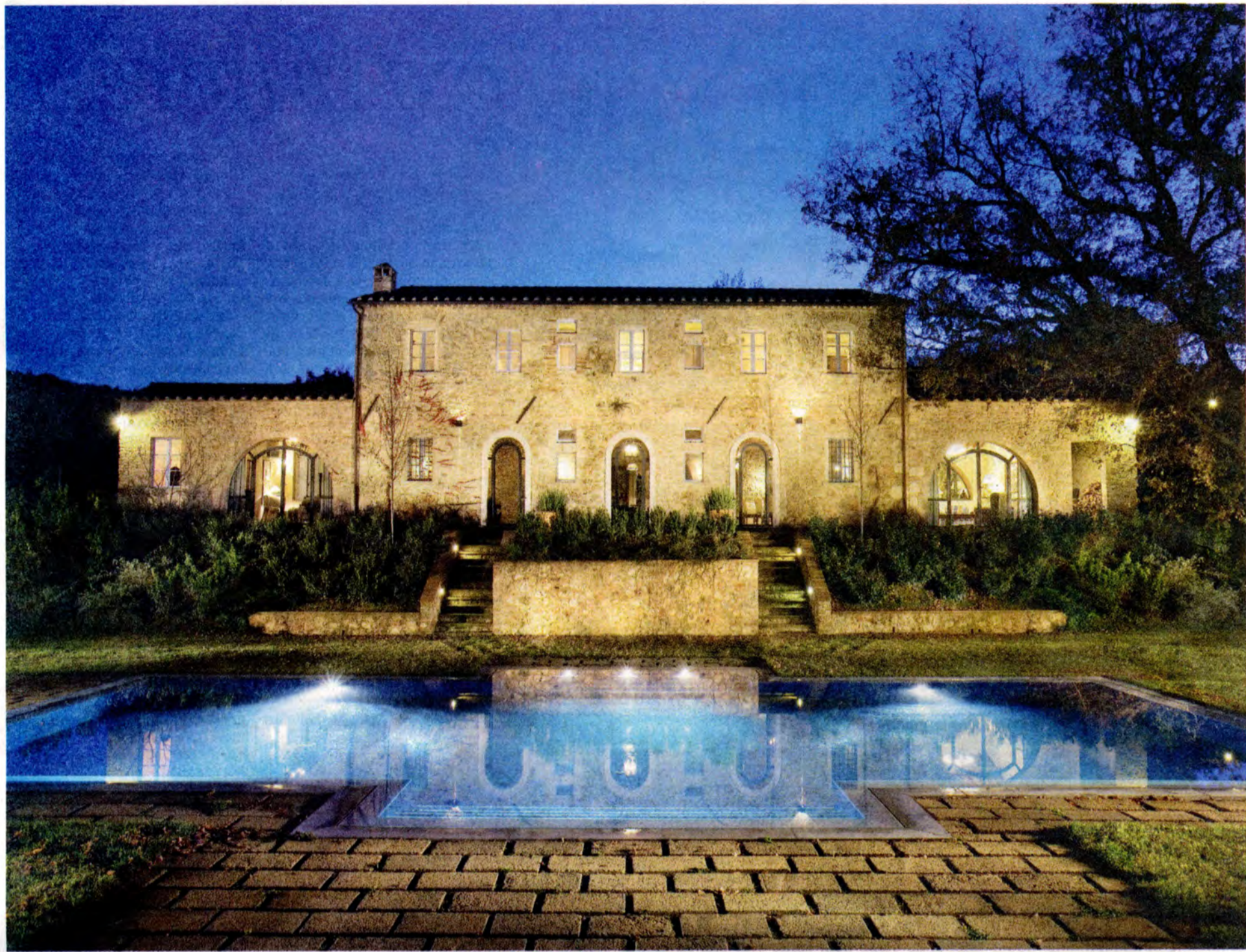


A private villa on  
Exclusive Resorts'  
Dominican Republic  
property. Story,  
Page LL5.



“ I had questioned the benefits of membership versus renting a luxury home privately or staying at a five-star resort. Why pay hefty membership fees if they can get the same experience for less? Here, I discover that for those in this league of travel, the numbers actually make sense

PHOTOS COURTESY EXCLUSIVE RESORTS



Exclusive Resorts' worldwide properties feature such luxuries as this tantalizing pool in Tuscany, above, and below, this lush bedroom at Park Avenue Place in New York City.

## OH, PORO PORO ME

My fleeting glimpse at how the wealthy vacation has me eternally envious *By Jeffrey Fisher*

I've always wanted to know how the other half lives — heck, let's narrow that down to how the top 1% lives. According to Statistics Canada, those earning at least \$191,000 per year before tax are in that lofty category. That isn't me, but when the elite vacation club Exclusive Resorts invites me to stay at one of its properties, I'm intrigued to learn how that sector vacations, too.

The premier destination club owns 350 homes in 71 destinations around the world. I have been invited to Poro Poro, the organization's members-only resort on Peninsula Papagayo in Costa Rica, to vacation like one of their own. Without running a credit check on me (I could never afford the \$215,000 membership), they've given me the rights and privileges of a four-day member.

I'm not among the high-net-worth families the Denver-based company caters to, and they know it — but they still want me to experience their unmatched level of personal service. I waste no time contacting my designated Exclusive Resorts ambassador, weeks in advance of my visit.

Not surprisingly, Molly is an absolute delight on the telephone. Her job is to know everything about my family and me. Considering I'm not a card-carrying member and I'll be travelling solo, I alone am her focus. She inquires about activities I enjoy, whether I prefer soft or hard pillows, what kind of wine and snacks I like, do I eat a hearty breakfast and on and on. I fully expect her to ask me my hopes and dreams.

It is my dedicated ambassador who liaises with Ricardo, my on-property concierge, to make sure the fridge is stocked upon my arrival with Rain Gatorade, frozen berries for my morning shakes and some smoked salmon. Ricardo is also my go-to for dinner reservations, arranging a private chef, ziplining and anything else I could possibly need.

After touchdown in the Costa Rican city of Liberia, my life as a privileged traveller begins to take shape.

As I exit customs, Ricardo hands me a cold facecloth and bottle of water. Sure, they're simple pleasures, but it's a treat to see someone with a friendly face hold-



ing a sign with my name on it, waiting to take me to an air-conditioned car.

The 90-minute drive to Poro Poro breezes by and soon we arrive at the jagged peninsula that stretches out into the Gulf of Papagayo. On the cliffs overlooking Culebra Bay, Exclusive Resorts (exclusiveresorts.com) has nestled 19 spectacular custom-designed villas (the company owns every one of the properties in its portfolio). Each has approximately 4,000 square feet of living space, four bedrooms with ensuite baths, a private infinity-edge pool and a golf cart for easy transportation around the property. All the rooms in my villa look out over the tree canopy to the ocean below. It's extraordinary, by anyone's standards.

Once settled, I cannot resist examining the contents of the fridge: California chardonnay, Pacific smoked salmon, frozen wild blueberries and strawberries. Impressive.

By the second day, it dawns on me that, in comparison to a family of six, I am undoubtedly under-utilizing Ricardo's full skill set. I'm almost certain he's used to juggling tee times, tennis

lessons and dinner reservations for out-of-the-way eateries. I do, however, have him plan a day excursion that includes ziplining (it's a sacrilege to visit Costa Rica and not do that), a sundown catamaran cruise and an in-villa massage.

Prior to my trip, I had questioned the benefits of membership versus renting a luxury home privately or staying at a five-star resort. Why would anyone pay a hefty membership fee if they can get the same experience for less?

Here, I discover that, for those in this league of luxury travel, the numbers actually make sense. With the \$215,000 lifetime membership fee, a member receives 20 days of travel annually and pays dues of approximately \$1,000 per day of travel (additional travel days can be had with higher membership fees). Properties range from one to eight bedrooms, but the same daily fee applies to any size villa. Comparatively, renting a four- to six-bedroom villa of the same calibre easily runs into \$7,500 or more per day (not including a Molly and Ricardo to make your stay effortless).

I meet a friendly and forthcoming

couple at the clubhouse, who tell me they bought a membership when their teenagers wanted to bring friends with them on holiday. The large villas are conducive to multi-generational socializing, whereas a hotel stay requires a number of adjoining rooms and socializing is limited to public areas of the hotel. This family had tried renting villas but always found the houses "overpromised and underdelivered." Now they book family vacations for Thanksgivings and Christmases and every year invite friends to join them for a getaway. They look at their membership as having 350 vetted second homes at their disposal. Not all are in resort locations; there are places to stay in many of the world's big cities, too.

Back in Toronto, I'm curious to hear a Canadian member's opinion of the membership's value. Of the group's 3,500 members, 150 are Canadian. I speak with Joan Charest (not her real name), who spends a great deal of her time organizing the lives of her husband and two children. They have a primary residence in the city and a summer home in Muskoka. She oversees the running of both, so when it comes to family vacations, she appreciates having someone else plan all the details. She contacts her Exclusive Resorts Ambassador, who helps plan their holidays a year in advance for the family, including in-laws or invited guests (though bookings can be made at short notice, too).

Ms. Charest tells me that prior to joining Exclusive Resorts, it was normal for week-long family vacations at a five-star resort to cost in the \$40,000 range, so they regard their membership as not only time saving but cost saving as well.

But there's more: Ms. Charest is also thankful it obliges her husband to take at least 20 days of family vacation a year. Before, he would prioritize work over holidays, often cancelling at the last minute. That's no longer the case. She's not sure if the membership mentality changed his ways or because their holiday is booked a year in advance, but whatever the reason, "it has definitely brought the family closer together," she confides.

And that's something ordinary money can't always buy.

National Post