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Travel

THE CARIBBEAN OPENINGS

By ELAINE GLUSAC

A WAVE of new hotels and resorts usually open their doors during high season in the islands. And despite the economic stasis, this year is no exception. There is, however, one discernible difference: they're highlighting experience along with escape. Whether high-end or mid-range, the most interesting newcomers are underscoring their location through cuisine, cultural events, design or programs.

PUERTO RICO

St. Regis Bahia Beach

Puerto Rico has urban luxury hotels and boutique coastal hideaways, but it has few properties that combine exclusivity and nature. The 139-room St. Regis Bahia Beach, set to open last week, fills the gap. The property sits on 483 acres fronting an undeveloped two-mile beach with inland views of El Yunque National Forest. The Espiritu Santo River runs from the park along the property, which received Audubon International's highest certification for environmentally conscious development. Staff naturalists guide bird-watching on more than seven miles of nature trails and kayak outings on the 63 acres of canals, ponds and lakes on the grounds. More glamorous amenities include a spa with seven indoor-

outdoor treatment rooms, a golf course designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr. and a restaurant from Jean-Georges Vongerichten supplied with organic produce by an on-site 2.4-acre garden. Rooms

start at \$759. Information: stregisbahiaibeach.com



The 139-room St. Regis.