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THE RUBY 15
recipe by Donna Brousseau
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Pleasantly Familiar, Blissfully Exotic

PUNTA MITA'S BRILLIANT COLORS AND FLAVORS ARE A RECIPE FOR REJUVENATION

Written and photographed by Jennifer Bradley Franklin

MEXICO HAS BECOME my home away from home of late, thanks to a half dozen trips in the last several years. It's happened almost by accident. One trip led to another and it's become the most frequent stamp in my passport.

When I received the invitation to the 4-day Punta Mita Gourmet and Golf Classic, just 30 minutes north of Puerto Vallarta, I jumped at the chance to see Mexico's western coast for the first time. I had the leisure to explore the St. Regis Punta Mita on my own before the festival began and made the most of it, laying on the beach, napping in hammocks scattered around the property and indulging in the resort's elevated cuisine. My husband Will and I tucked into our spacious second floor room, with jaw-dropping sea views. I later learned that this arresting sight was par for the course; built on a hill that rises vertically out of the sapphire Pacific, all of the resort's 120 rooms and suites have a sea view.

We arrived mid-day, accompanied by our Dallas-based friends Randy Katz and Abraham Salum, the latter of whom was one of the festival's featured chefs. Since they knew the lay of the land (having attended in the past) they steered us immediately to Mita Mary, a beach-side eatery on the property. Part food truck, part shipwreck, all of the ultra-fresh tacos, ceviches, guacamole and cocktails made from squeezed-on-the-spot fruit are made right there in a tiny kitchen on the beach.

It was only my second stay at a St. Regis (the first time I stayed at the exquisite Atlanta property), but it was obvious that the brand takes pride in delighting guests in unexpected ways. One such surprise was that our round-the-clock butlers (a task split by two staffers) were available by text message. From morning coffee delivered alongside one-bite cookies to unpacking our bags, they were always just a message away.



Remède Spa at the St. Regis Punta Mita is a haven that includes rambling relaxation areas for guests to enjoy before or after their services.

Since the resort faces west, the sunsets over the Pacific Ocean are guaranteed to be spectacular. As the sun slipped toward the horizon on our first night, the brilliant hues of gold, hot pink, orange and even violet felt like a good omen, somehow blessing our journey to an unfamiliar part of the country.



PUNTA MITA GOURMET AND GOLF CLASSIC
 This year's festival will be held November 29 through December 2. Learn more at eventospuntamita.com/gourmetgolf.

(clockwise from above) St. Regis Punta Mita boasts three pools, including this one reserved for adults only; each villa offers indoor and outdoor living space and spectacular ocean views; sunsets are a main event at St. Regis Punta Mita, thanks to the resort's westward orientation; Punta Mita's 36 holes of waterfront greens are a golfer's paradise.



Dallas-based chef Abraham Salum presents his lobster rolls on the beach.

courses, with many holes adjacent to or facing the glittering Pacific. Celebrated Mexican golfer Lorena Ochoa played alongside guests in appreciation for the festival proceeds that will support her foundation promoting education and healthy family activities through golf.

Not being a golfer, I took advantage of a festival perk for those who don't feel the greens' siren song. I spent a blissfully relaxed morning in Remède Spa at the St. Regis. After a few minutes unwinding next to a trickling waterfall, I retired for a two-hour *Hisi* awakening ritual. I learned that *hisi* means dream healer in Cora, an indigenous Uto-Aztec language. The therapist gently rubbed sun-kissed skin with a jasmine- and grapefruit-scented scrub, before a gentle massage and facial with hydrating cucumber and soothing aloe. I may or may not have been so relaxed that I drifted off a bit during the treatment, confirming the wisdom of its unusual name.

If it were possible, this visit to Mexico's far coast made me fall even more in love with the country, with its wild landscape, beautiful people and intricately layered flavors. Punta Mita was exotic enough to feel like a discovery and just familiar enough to feel instantly like home.

ST. REGIS PUNTA MITA
stregispuntamita.com

The festival kicked off in grand style with an extravagant party on the beach, hosted by Punta Mita's other signature resort, Four Seasons. More than 20 chefs from both properties and from around the globe prepared tasting bites, while guests wandered around, bare toes in the sand. I immediately sought out some familiar faces, searching for Atlanta-based chefs Ford Fry and Drew Belline (best known for his work at No. 246 and St. Cecilia) who were guest chefs at the festival. Their delicate scallops on the half shell, topped with juicy satsumas and crisp radish, were among my favorite bites of the evening. We tasted mezcal from boutique producers, indulged in just-fried churros from a portable cart and gazed up at a sky full of incandescent stars.

Since the festival is meant to be a choose-your-own-adventure-style event, some revelers (like yours truly) opted for days filled with culinary experiences including cooking classes, wine and tequila tastings and meals paired with carefully selected spirits. Meanwhile, golf aficionados played through two spectacular Jack Nicklaus-designed



Chef Ford Fry, from Atlanta, arranges ice to display his dish.



Flavors pairing suggestion:
 Rivata Moscato d'Asti

Coconut Pie

Recipe by Ford Fry, Executive Chef/Owner and Drew Belline, Vice President of Culinary, Ford Fry Restaurants

Yield: 1 nine-inch pie

- 2 ounces butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 vanilla bean, scraped (optional)
- 2 3/4 ounces buttermilk
- 2 pinches salt
- 2/3 cup sweet shredded coconut
- 1 store-bought 9-inch graham cracker pie crust, par baked*

Melt butter. Let cool slightly. Add sugar to melted butter and stir with spatula to combine. Add eggs 1 at a time, stirring to combine, adding next egg only after first egg has been thoroughly incorporated. Add vanilla and vanilla bean, then stir in buttermilk and salt. Gently fold in shredded coconut. Try not to incorporate too much air during this mixing process as it alters the final product.

Heat oven to 325 degrees.

Pour filling into par-baked shell so that it comes just to rim of edge of crust (you may have some left-over filling). Bake until top of pie is golden brown and custard no longer jiggles. Let pie completely cool before serving.

*Par bake crust to a light golden brown and no more as that would make the crust too crunchy.



The festival's closing party was held on the St. Regis beach amid glittering lights.

Nantucket Bay Scallops on the Half Shell with Satsumas and Radish

Recipe by Ford Fry, Executive Chef/Owner and Drew Belline, Vice President of Culinary, Ford Fry Restaurants

Yield: 20–24 bite size portions

- 1 pound Nantucket bay scallops*
- 1 large shallot, fine dice
- 1 ounce champagne vinegar
- 1 Meyer lemon, juiced
- 10 satsumas (a type of mandarin orange), divided
- sea salt to taste
- freshly cracked pepper to taste
- 3 ounces high-quality extra-virgin olive oil as needed
- 1 bunch beautiful small radishes
- 2 sprigs tarragon
- 1 ounce chives, sliced thin

To clean scallops, remove small abductor muscle, gently rinse in cold water and pat dry with paper towels. If you can find scallops still live in the shell even better. Just make sure you reserve shells to serve scallops in once shucked.

To make this very simple vinaigrette, in a small bowl, whisk together shallot, vinegar, lemon juice, juice of 3 satsumas, zest of 1 satsuma, a pinch of sea salt, pepper and olive oil. Check for seasoning.

When you're ready to serve, cut remaining satsumas into supremes (sections with no peel or pith) and shave radishes. Toss scallops in vinaigrette, spoon into shells (or other serving dish if shells unavailable), and top with shaved radish, satsuma segments, picked tarragon and sliced chives. Top scallops with a little sea salt and serve presentation on ice.



Flavors pairing suggestion:
Blanka Vinho Verde

*This is 1 pound shelled. It's super important to make sure your Nantucket bay scallops are of the freshest quality. Nantucket bay scallops are one of our most celebrated ingredients of the fall and very little needs to be done to them to present their candy-like sweetness. If preparing this dish when Nantucket bay scallops are no longer available, use the freshest scallops you can find.