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ISSUE

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Photo by John Running



Chic BAREFOOT

BY DIANNA SMITH

You Can Let Your Hair Down At Serene, Sumptuous Kamalame Cay

Just a short trek from South Florida is one of the few places left in this hemisphere where visitors are offered a tiny slice of paradise all to themselves. And who wouldn't want that? These precious moments of serenity are found on the private island resort of Kamalame Cay in the Bahamas, where one can walk three miles of white sandy beaches or fish in tranquil sparkling blue waters—without ever encountering another soul.

Priding itself on the seclusion it offers, Kamalame Cay is nestled off the northeast coast of Andros Island, which is the largest island in the Bahamas and the fifth largest in the West Indies. But biggest doesn't translate to the busiest, as it's the only Bahamian island still mostly underdeveloped and home to only 6,000 people. That's why Kamalame Cay is considered a hidden gem.

A gem the resort's team is hoping will entice South Floridians.

"Even though the temperature is not that different, you're surrounded by palm trees, walking on sand roads. Everybody is relaxed and you're not at home," says Michael King, the property's co-managing director. "In an hour, you can be a world away."



Photo by Andis Ganouna

Photos by John Running

NO SHOES REQUIRED

Just getting to the private island is an exercise in relaxation. Floridians can take an hour plane ride from Miami or Fort Lauderdale to the Andros Town Airport. Next comes a brief scenic drive, followed by a private ferry ride (or opt for an exotic seaplane experience) and less than an hour later, you arrive at Kamalame Cay, where you're met on the dock with fresh-squeezed orange juice and a bottle of rum.

Visitors are greeted by first name, and given a cellphone in case of emergency and a golf cart for exploring on their own.

Co-Managing Director David Hew, whose parents, Brian and Jennifer Hew, opened the resort 16 years ago, calls the private island a "barefoot-chic Caribbean resort" where guests aren't even required to wear shoes to dinner. It offers a laid-back environment with no specific dinner times, no dress code.

Though, when it comes to dining, the attention to detail is anything but casual.

The restaurants offer white tablecloths adorned with exotic foods and candlelit dinners with exceptional service. Whatever you're craving, the team at Kamalame Cay makes sure you get it. King recalls once meeting a guest's request to have wild pork. Though it wasn't on the menu, the staff found one and roasted it a few days later.



"It's the last piece of paradise left. This is the part of the world where you can come and be you." — Peter Douglas, manager, Andros Ministry of Tourism Office



"What we all want in life is what we don't have or can't have," King says. "So we spend a lot of time trying to give that to people. It's very rare that we can't do something for somebody."

Perhaps that's why the resort's well-heeled clientele includes celebrities such as Keith Urban and Nicole Kidman, as well as business titans, movie studio executives and others who, while not seeking total seclusion, simply want to be free from autographs and gawking.

"They just want to get away from it all," King says. "That, to them, is luxury."

Famous or not, all guests here receive star treatment.



PARADISE FOUND

The intimate resort's 19 seaside rooms and suites (which don't offer TV sets or telephones unless requested) include bungalows, beach houses and bougainvillea-draped cottages, and all guests receive complimentary baskets of fresh-baked pastries and organic yogurt delivered to their doorsteps by 7 a.m.

But you won't know it until you awake. That's because there's no door knocking or verbal greetings from the hallway (unless you want that). Rather, the 120 or so staffers are trained to be *invisible*, creating a sense of wonderful seclusion and serenity. When staffers do interact with guests, such as in the restaurant, it's always warm and genuine. According to Hew, it's not uncommon to see staffers teary-eyed when it's time for guests to leave.

"The feel about the property is that it's more like a friend's home," he says.

The Kamalame Cay resort has helped boost tourism tremendously for the Andros Island community, as well as offer employment to its residents. Peter Douglas, manager at the Andros Ministry of Tourism Office, says the resort is unlike others in the Caribbean because very few resort communities sit within an unspoiled ecosystem.

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world where you can come and be you. Let your hair down, relax and feel safe."

Kamalame Cay is home to 4,000 coconut trees that staffers planted themselves. It's a green resort that's almost fully converted to solar power and uses recycled vegetable oil instead of diesel. Most of the food in the kitchen is organic as are the spa products and even the bed sheets.

There's a freshwater pool and a tiki bar with an open grill that regularly hosts torch-lit Bahamian beach barbecue banquets with entertainment from local "rake & scrape" bands.

And when you're ready to explore the island, there are plenty of options. You can take eco-tours by way of kayak or sand buggy, or go with a private guide on a boat excursion and learn how to spearfish. If you're lucky enough to catch a big one, such as tuna or lionfish, you can bring it back to the resort and have the chef prepare it for dinner. The area is also popular for snorkeling and diving since it's located along the world's third-largest barrier reef.

And if none of these options appeal to you, simply do what guests tend to enjoy most at Kamalame Cay.

Walk barefoot in the sand. Gaze at the mysterious, beautiful waters.

Relax and enjoy this tiny slice of paradise all by yourself.

"It feels like Bora Bora, but it's not 18 hours away," Hew says. "It really is a fantasy land." ○

Photos by Anais Ganouna

Photo by John Running

