

The Miami Herald

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SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2004 | 102ND YEAR, NO. 68 | ©2004 THE MIAMI HERALD | FINAL | ONE DOLLAR

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UP FRONT | FORD CHAMPIONSHIP WEEKEND

A BURST OF CHEERS



CARL RISTE/HERALD STAFF

CONGRESS

GOP rejects 9/11 reform efforts

■ House Republicans turn down a compromise on efforts to reform U.S. intelligence, possibly dooming calls by the 9/11 commission for a director of national intelligence to oversee all U.S. intelligence.

Caribbean / Bahamas

island renewal

Golf,
family
programs
and
affordable

BY DAVID SWANSON
Special to the Herald

If location is everything, then life for Caribbean-bound travelers is a sun-drenched blessing, with the occasional curse.

No doubt the lively 2004 hurricane season inspired more than a few of the latter. Three major storms ravaged the Caribbean in September, leaving businesses on a few islands — particularly Grand Cayman, Grenada, Haiti and the northern Bahamas — scrambling for power, water and insurance adjusters. But if the Weather Channel left you with an image of the region limited to flooded tennis courts and washed-away beaches, then it's time to broaden the perspective.

Most of the Caribbean suffered no real harm from the 2004 storms. Several islands that were grazed by hurricanes saw only cosmetic damage that is already largely repaired. Hurricane season is almost over, and today the Caribbean is eagerly anticipating another kind of deluge: visitors.

Here are some of the new items on the agenda.

NEW HOTELS

Why mess with a proven formula when you can build a discreet addition to lure a higher-paying crowd? Such is the path two of the region's best-loved small hotels chose this year.

In Aruba, **Bucuti Beach Resort** opened a new wing, the Tara Beach Suites, offering a sleek boutique approach to Caribbean living. Located on the island's quietest stretch of sand, most of the 39 new rooms have beach views and use dark wood tones and white fabrics, creating a Zen mood. The rooms have mini bar, high-speed Internet and 24-hour concierge services. The resort also built a new spa that provides treatments on the beach or in private rooms. Doubles start at \$140 until Dec. 22 and at \$255 after that date. (011-297) 583-1100; www.bucuti.com.

Anse Chastanet resort in St. Lucia has been one of the Caribbean's most successful hideaways, with rooms that offer a broad

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

Lavish, glam resorts put two-island nation on a new plane

■ These stunning properties add an element of pure luxury to the equally paradisiacal Antigua and Barbuda.

BY DAVID SWANSON
Special to The Herald

The two-island nation of Antigua and Barbuda delivers the Caribbean's specialty — long, luminous beaches — in abundance. And with two resorts debuting this year, the islands offer new outposts for deluxe escape: one with swank European pedigree, the other promising a barefoot hide-away.

CARLISLE BAY

Created by Scotsman Gordon Campbell Gray, Antigua's Carlisle Bay is a striking, utterly contemporary resort intended to complement his esteemed hotel, One Aldwych in London.

Located away from most of the island's limited action, on the southwest coast, Carlisle Bay is little more than a stone's throw from Antigua's long-established Curtain Bluff resort.

The two serve as bookends for a village that slumbers at the base of Fig Tree Drive, a road through the island's most verdant valley.

Carlisle Bay entices guests across a bridge over a lily pond into a sprawling, sedate pavilion, lined with planters made from seven-foot-high hollowed-out tree trunks and wooden jalousie shutters.

Chilled towels and warm handshakes are offered against a monochromatic backdrop; the little color provided is from splays of purple orchids.

All 88 rooms are suites, and almost all boast unimpeded sea views from Frette-outfitted beds. An orchid sits on a dark wood cabinet, while its matching credenza supports a tray of improbable fruit,



OPEN-AIR LOUNGE: Beach House Hotel, in Barbuda.

COURTESY BEACH HOUSE HOTEL



COURTESY CARLISLE BAY

BLUE DREAMS: Ocean Suite at Carlisle Bay, Antigua.



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serve as bookends
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Bay onices guests
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a coffee maker,
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BLUE DREAMS: Ocean Suite at Carlisle Bay, Antigua.

land bath products and a deep
bath tub with a view into the
mangrove lagoon that backs
et Gallies.

Outfitted with a well-
equipped water-sports center,
the beach is pretty and fine for
swimming, though it doesn't
enjoy the iridescent, tourma-
line glow that Antigua's most
beautiful beaches can brag of
— that's because a river cas-
ries silt into the bay at one end
(in rainy season, anyway).
During my visit I saw more
people hanging by the pool
than on the sand.

Perhaps owing to the repu-
tation of One Aldwych, most
of the guests during my visit
were British, and there's a
noticeable reserve to interac-
tions. But the largely Antiguan
staff is cheerful and gracious,
not stiff, like some upscale
resorts.

Carlisle Bay's other
strength is above-average
resort dining. One restaurant,
East, sits behind Balinese
doors, in a hermetically sealed
black room with chairs
adorned in blushing pink slip-
covers. East's Philippine wait-
ress and Thai chef served a
pan-Asian menu that was sur-

prisingly good and authentic
— all but unheard of in the
Caribbean.

Indigo on the Beach is the
open-air dining room with a
grill, with many of the menu
items organic in origin.

Against expectation, my
chief carp at Carlisle Bay was
not its clifed design sensibili-
ty. But a sterile buzz of fans
and air conditioners was
omnipresent, particularly in
the restaurants and bath-
rooms, obscuring the natural
island sounds of lapping
waves and fusing birds.

ON TO BARBUDA

In contrast to Antigua's
"on-the-map" status for Carib-
bean regulars, Barbuda is one
of the region's most off-the-
beaten-track destinations,
reachable only from Antigua
and boasting a trio of expen-
sive resorts with a combined
total of less than 100 rooms,
and little else.

From a distance, Barbuda
appears flat and featureless,
with no apparent vegetation.
It's not small — at 62 square
miles it's twice the size of St.
Thomas. But with most of the



DAVID SWANSON FOR THE HERALD
TRAY CHIC: Welcome drinks at the Beach House in Barbuda.

island undeveloped, and just
1,200 residents, Barbuda feels
diminutive. A beach lines vir-
tually the entire west coast,
seemingly unbroken for miles.
In the middle of this sits The
Beach House, a hotel created
from the bones of the old Pal-
metto Beach Hotel, a property
that seemed to spend as much
time closed as open during the
last decade.

Because almost all the
island's vegetation is scrubby,
as one drives on the sand road
note there's no habitable
structure in sight for miles.

The hotel sits at a remarkable
site — unusual because Carib-
bean beaches normally tuck
into coves. At Palmetto Point,
the sand gathers into a 90-de-
gree corner that points toward
the sea. I'm not sure if this
would be a smart place to be in
a tempest, and some swim-
ming guests noted an under-
tow, but the huge sweep of
sand that wraps The Beach
House is undeniably dramatic.

The Beach House doesn't
compete with the setting. The
understated lobby and restau-
rant are in a white-washed
building, with large wooden
shutters that open all sides to
the breeze. The backdrop: an
unusually large pool, the
beach and the sea, unfettered
by palm trees, cabanas or
water-sport equipment.

The hotel staff, referred to
here as Service Ambassadors,
wear an attractive uniform of
flowing white linens con-
ceived by Trinidadian
designer Heather Jones. One
ambassador is assigned to
each of the 21 rooms, like a
personal butler, and they
unpack luggage, coordinate
your welcome massage (in-
room or on the beach), and
arrange activities, which
include most water sports,
yoga lessons and horseback
riding.

Though not suites, rooms
are of generous size, with a
bed positioned in the middle
of the space, bulging with
goose-down feather bed and
Fill d'Oro linens.

As in the common areas,
the surfaces are all-white, with
occasional deep-blue accents.
Amenities include a cellphone,
espresso machine and bath
products by Essential Ele-
ments. But, compared to most
high-end resorts, the minimal-
ist bathroom is functional and
little more.

Each room has a deck fac-
ing a man-made, foot-deep
pond, backed by the beach —
at night the lagoon sparkles
with blue lights. Depending on
your mood, the effect could be
magical, or it might feel a little
like a deserted airport runway
at night.

For an island of Barbuda's
remoteness, I found the hotel's
kitchen to be overly ambitious.
But some items by chef
Andrea Coppola — including
varied treatments of the
island's famed lobster — were
right on the mark. Other din-
ing options outside the resort
are almost nonexistent.

The Beach House was cre-
ated by Marcello M. Pigozzo, a
30-year veteran of the hotel
industry — formerly general
manager of the Hotel Inter-
Continental in Miami — who
is also president and CEO of
publicly traded Caribbean
Clubs International. The com-
pany aims to acquire other
island properties and reshape
them with the Service Ambas-
sador concept.

Pigozzo feels the success of
The Beach House hinges on
the Service Ambassadors, who
are expected to get to know
their clients' needs as quickly
as possible after check-in. "I
do not expect this place to be
for everyone," Pigozzo says.
"The majority of people who
can afford whatever they want
are unimpressed by furniture,
by glitter, by interior design.
They're looking for space, for
a place where they can lick
their wounds."

David Swanson is author of
the *Frommer's San Diego
guidebook* and writes the
Affordable Caribbean col-
umn for *Caribbean Travel &
Life* magazine.



COURTESY CARLISLE BAY

Incredible...
or inedible?



Check the dining reviews in The Herald's Weekend section.
WEEKEND
Dine... without reservations

RESTAURANT	ADDRESS	PHONE	RESERVATIONS
17. N.E. Caribbean, Great Caymans, Antigua, Barbuda, St. John's, Barbados, St. Kitts	1256-1256	524-1256	NO
18. The Great Caymans, Jamaica, St. John's, Barbados, St. Kitts	1256-1256	524-1256	NO
19. The Great Caymans, Jamaica, St. John's, Barbados, St. Kitts	1256-1256	524-1256	NO
20. The Great Caymans, Jamaica, St. John's, Barbados, St. Kitts	1256-1256	524-1256	NO
21. The Great Caymans, Jamaica, St. John's, Barbados, St. Kitts	1256-1256	524-1256	NO

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FINNAIR

Flights between December 15th and December 23rd, 2004. Departure and return on Thursday and Saturday only. Minimum stay is one minimum stay in Finland. Maximum stay is 14 days. Maximum stay is 14 days. Subject to limited availability. Round-trip fares only. Taxes and other restrictions apply. Subject to limited availability. Transportation Tax / September 11 Security Fee / Passenger Facility Charge / Airport Charge (if up to approximately US \$16.00 per passenger).

WEEKEND
Dine... without reservations

Check the dining reviews in The Herald's Weekend section.

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20. The Great Caymans, Jamaica, St. John's, Barbados, St. Kitts	1256-1256	524-1256	NO
21. The Great Caymans, Jamaica, St. John's, Barbados, St. Kitts	1256-1256	524-1256	NO

For reservation information, please call (850) 551-8048. Email: info@10travel.com