

The New York Times  
**Travel**

Sunday, October 29, 2006

Section 5

8 TH

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2006

HEADS UP) CARIBBEAN RESORTS

# Infinity Pools, Golf Courses and Sandcastle U.

By CINDY PRICE

**W**HAT'S the big buzz in the Caribbean this year? All the privacy and luxury in the world, but you'll have to pay. Then again, no one ever said the good life came at a discount.

The good news is there are lots of options besides the opulent suites that carry eye-popping price tags. The Caribbean, officially built out and megadeveloped, wants to make sure everyone gets a piece of the pie. Especially as the West Indies gets prepped to be host of the Ninth ICC Cricket World Cup (cricketworldcup.com), which formally begins March 11 at the newly renovated Sabina Park in Jamaica.

If you're in the mood to mix, the big resorts are expanding with multimillion-dollar renovations. Need something in between? The Caribbean islands have been courting classic hotel brands like Marriott, Westin and Radisson. And wherever you aim to drop your bags this winter, the airlines are making it easier to get there.

And more good news: If you hunt a little, you can still find some peace and quiet for under \$300 a night.

## Bahama Out Islands

In the Bahamas (Caribbean in every sense but geographical), there's a rush of plans to develop some of the lesser-known Out Islands that have grown so popular in recent years. "In an ideal world, you'd have just enough people to support the infrastructure, and not one person more," said Kaye Pearson, who purchased the private island of Chub Cay (pronounced key) three years ago.

"What we're seeing down there is an explosion in terms of investment and resort development, both in Chub Cay and elsewhere in the Bahamas," Mr. Pearson said. "And it's just boiling down to privacy versus major-intensity development."

With both privacy and preservation in mind, Mr. Pearson and his team are developing only 220 acres of the 1,000-acre island (877-234-2482; chubcay.com), which includes 205 housing units ranging from town houses to five-bedroom homes. The island is already a hot destination for big-game fishermen, with the first half of the marina open. The 20,000-square-foot clubhouse should be finished by January.

And if guests do get itchy, Mr. Pearson pointed out, Chub Cay is only a 12-minute puddle jump from Nassau (helicopter service is expected by next spring), where guests can indulge in the three G's: golf, gambling and Gucci. Twelve of the villas should be ready by December, when they'll be put into a rental pool, with single lock-out rooms starting at around \$275 in the high season.



ABOVE Ladera, on St. Lucia, is adding open-air suites.



RIGHT The Radisson on Aruba just opened a big oceanfront spa.



David Swanson



David Swanson

LEFT The Ritz-Carlton on St. Thomas after a \$40 million renovation. BELOW The Chub Cay resort is leaving much of its Bahama Out Island undeveloped.

Roughly 50 miles from Miami, another little island, North Bimini, is rapidly developing under the stewardship of the Bimini Bay Resort and Casino (305-513-0506; biminibayresort.com). In June, a 96-unit mix of condos, loft-style treehouses and single-family homes opened up to the public, with rentals starting at \$250 a night.

The resort owns a smaller private island just offshore, and offers a full-service marina and infinity pool. Plans are under way to add a luxury hotel, a casino, a spa, a shopping village and a golf course, not to mention an even bigger marina to accommodate those ever-growing megayachts so popular with the South Florida set.

## Turks and Caicos

Just south of the Bahamas, the cluster of islands that make up Turks and Caicos are

responding to their increasing popularity with a host of ultra-luxury hotels, including last spring's opening of Amanyaara (866-941-8133; amanaresorts.com).

Following the lead of Amanyaara's success, the 54-suite Somerset on Grace Bay (649-946-5900; thesomerset.com) had a soft opening last June, but will officially swing open its doors next month. Set on 4.6 beachfront acres just next door to the Palms, this luxury boutique resort features unique guest activities like a seminar at the Sandcastle University, taught by the Guinness world-record holder in sandcastle building. One-bedroom suites with an ocean view start at \$1,300 a night in the winter season.

If those prices make your head spin, but you still want a little taste of Turks and Caicos, the new \$45 million Grand Turk Cruise Terminal is officially open. Carnival Cruise

lines (866-299-5698; carnival.com), including Holland America and Princess, will be sailing into the port all winter.

## Lesser Antilles

In response to growing American tourism in the Caribbean, the islands are courting more household-name hotel brands. Next month, Marriott International will open its 20th Caribbean resort, the 122-room Courtyard by Marriott, Port of Spain (868-627-5555; marriott.com), in Trinidad.

Once you're there, BWIA West Indies Airways (bwee.com), which will morph into Caribbean Airlines (caribbean-airlines.com) at year's end, is hoping to get you island-hopping. The carrier connects Trinidad and Tobago to major international destinations, as well as to other nearby Caribbean islands.

In St. Lucia, the sky's the limit for isolated luxury villas as long as money isn't a concern. The popular Ladera (800-738-4752; ladera.com) lodge is adding two more private, open-air Dream Suites to its property. The lavish accommodations are set to open by the holiday season, and are removed from the rest of the property, with decks that look out on the Pitons and the Caribbean Sea, and spiral staircases that lead to a private pool. Rates for the suites start at \$740 a night, with a six-night minimum stay.

Meanwhile, St. Vincent, which will be host of the Cricket World Cup warm-ups March 5, 6, 8 and 9, is gearing up for its first luxury resort development. The five-star Buccament Bay Resort (44-1268-414-900; harlequin-property.com) is erecting a condo-villa development featuring a private

Continued on Page 16