

TOGETHER: CITY LIVES

Innovative hotelier Paul Doyle tells Shinan Govani about his ‘marriage of hospitality and health’

A Toronto-based hotelier builds a testing lab at his Barbados resort



By **Shinan Govani** Contributing Columnist
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When Paul Doyle first laid eyes on The Crane – said to be the oldest continuously operating resort in the Caribbean – he was smitten on the spot.

“I could not believe that this gorgeous 18-room historic hotel located on a breathtaking cliff, on 40 acres, was available for sale,” he says. “I saw the potential immediately.”

He also saw potential in the band of white sand that deepens to pink, depending on the light, which sits at the hotel’s base. The waves from the Atlantic, when they lap against this eastern side of Barbados, make the beach catnip for surfers.

“A lot of Canadian banks have branches in Barbados, and we actually did the deal with the RBC at Yonge and Bloor,” Doyle says. “I was able to fund the required down payment with the proceeds of the sale of my house in Oakville.”

At the time, he had been on the island looking for a home for an insurance company, and Barbados checked all the boxes: amazing weather, solid telecommunications, water you can drink from the tap, not to mention good connections to his home in Toronto. Soon the hotel became his passion.

That was in 1988, and since then, the property has bellied out to 225 rooms, added a handful of restaurants, in some ways becoming a village unto itself. But even the younger Doyle would not believe what the older Doyle would be up to all these years later – during a pandemic. For one thing, building his own on-site testing lab – a bit of trailblazing in the world of international travel that has got gotten oodles of attention, even recently in Forbes.

“I read everything I could about virology and microbiology and more,” he says. “We consulted with scientific experts and researched the very best test kits and the most accurate testing instruments.” Not only was The Crane the first hotel in Barbados with a government-approved quarantine facility (guests could stay in designated rooms awaiting results), but today it offers rapid Antigen tests and highly accurate PCR tests with same-day results. The hotel has eliminated the anxiety associated with missing a flight if results are delayed and has doctors on-site.

This is all part of what Doyle describes as “a marriage of hospitality and health.”

Making it happen

Self-motivation has long been Doyle’s thing, going back to his days in the Toronto Catholic School system, when, during grade 10, he delivered newspapers in the morning and worked the school’s switchboard on weekends. But at the end of that school year, he admits, “I was asked to leave for a number of reasons, including using the school’s phones between classes to call my stockbroker to check on my very small portfolio that I purchased with my paper route earnings.”

Moving to the public school system, he was somehow able to negotiate an arrangement with the vice principal, he says, “where I would quit school, study on my own and be allowed to come back to write my final exams.” He later took a job in the factory where his father worked.

What makes a good hotelier? I had to ask, and he had a ready answer: “In my case, I had no hotel experience, so to become a good hotelier meant finding the right mix of service-oriented, trained hospitality professionals to help me.”

Living well

Being a snowbird – he summers in Toronto and spends the colder months in Barbados – Doyle enjoys the best of both worlds. “My wife and I walk every day to magnificent beaches along this coast,” he says of Barbados. “One of my favourites is Palmetto Bay. It’s pretty much off the radar but a wonderful spot for a picnic. Barbados is an extremely healthy place to live – the Victorians who came here to cure respiratory ailments were onto something.”

In Toronto, Doyle makes his home Summerhill, “taking advantage of all the things a vibrant city has to offer. We enjoy the walkability of our neighbourhood: the restaurants, boutiques and galleries.”

Back on island time these days – in a resort that has attracted the rock-star likes of Mick Jagger and Rod Stewart – Doyle is ecstatic to see all the returning faces. Getting to know families from one year to the next is, for him, one of the best things about the business. “For many visitors,” he says, “it has become an annual tradition that they really missed over the past two years.”

SPECIAL TO THE STAR