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NATIONAL POST, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2018



NANCY TRUMAN

# A piece of paradise

Standing on the balcony of my suite at The Crane Resort in Barbados, watching the waves of the Atlantic crash ashore as day fades to night, it's easy to understand why this former British colony has captivated travellers for centuries. Of course, just about anywhere you go in the Caribbean you can find unimpeded views of the wave-whipped Atlantic or the calm, turquoise Caribbean Sea, dramatic sunrises or sunsets, long strands of sandy beaches with swaying palm trees, fresh tropical fruit, free-flowing rum punch, and plenty of sunshine. What's harder to find is the peace of mind Barbados offers snowbirds looking to buy a piece of paradise.

Not surprisingly, after a year of record hurricanes crippled popular destinations and severely damaged properties, concern about hurricanes, volcanoes and earthquakes has heightened. "Barbados hasn't had a direct hit from a hurricane since 1955," Paul Doyle, founder and managing director of The Crane Resort, explained.

By many accounts, Barbados tourist numbers suffered from confusion between it and Barbuda, the small island about a 90-minute flight northwest of Barbados, which was devastated by Hurricane Irma in September. While Barbados has the good fortune to be closer to the equator, nowhere is immune to natural disaster. That said, the island delivers, when it comes to a general checklist that includes a good standard of living, established education and health care systems, low crime levels and feeling at ease with the population.

Torontonian Doyle, who used to work in the reinsurance business in Canada, first went to explore the opportunity of buying a small, out-of-the-way hotel in the late 1980s. He ended up selling his home in the city's Wychwood neighbourhood and buying the Crane Hotel, which has perched on 16 hectares of cliff-top land on the southeast coast of the island since 1887.

"Barbados grew on me the longer I stayed," says Doyle, who is now a resident. "It became clear Canadians are very appreciated here. And that the people are very warm and welcoming."

During a tour of the property, Doyle frequently points out that design, engineering, construction, furnishings, landscaping and management are all done in-house in keeping with his belief that you can have luxury without an exorbitant price tag, while maintaining authenticity and harmony with nature.

The award-winning resort has five restaurants — serving everything from sushi, to seafood, and southern Italian — a café, shops, a fitness centre, spa, tennis courts and pools.

Doyle's uncompromising approach to development has been applied in two previously announced residential projects that are underway. The first of five buildings at The Private Residences at Crane is move-in ready. Spread over two hectares, each building has 16 two- and three-bedroom units of 1,916 sq. ft. and 3,619 sq. ft., respectively.

And a model home sits at the low-density, eco-friendly East Coast Beach Houses, 35 minutes north of Crane on the one per cent of the east coast not allocated to Barbados' National Park. When finished, 63 free-standing two- and three-bedroom beach houses will snuggle into the rolling hillside overlooking Skeet's Bay Beach and Culppepper Island, each with unimpeded ocean views.

Site plans include a boutique hotel, two restaurants, a bar, day spa, a wellness centre and a convenience store.



PHOTOS: NANCY TRUMAN

The landscaping and building placement lend to the feeling of seclusion and harmony with nature at The Crane Resort.

Completing the site will likely take seven to 10 years, Doyle says, adding he'd rather take his time than use a "build it and they will come" approach.

It seems "liming," the Barbadian term for relaxing, has its benefits. An article in the most recent *Ins and Outs* of Barbados magazine cites a global survey ranking the island second to Okinawa, Japan when it comes to reaching a ripe, old age. The Caribbean nation, with a population of about 285,000, boasts more than 110 centenarians, which the writer attributes to the island's stress-free lifestyle; access to clean, coral-filtered drinking water; cooling trade winds that keep temperatures at 24 to 28C; and a diet rich in ground vegetables — think yams, sweet potatoes, dasheen root and cassava.

If you choose to buy a Crane property on the southeast coast, you can be relaxing on Crane Beach — widely considered one of the Top 10 beaches in the world — in less than 20 minutes after clearing customs. There are no nightclubs, or noisy motorboats and jet skis zipping around feet from where you are swimming. Unlike the west Platinum Coast, you can't even see another resort.

Don't think you have to trade excursions and nightlife for tranquillity and seclusion, though. Barbados is only 19 kilometres from top to bottom and 12 km across at its widest point, putting destinations such as the lush Hunt's Gardens, the many pink and white-sand beaches along more than 110 km of coastline, distilleries including St. Nicholas Abbey near the top,



Above, a beach house, below, main bedroom in the model home, bottom, hot tub heaven.



and many great restaurants and rum shops a short distance away.

You can get a reasonably priced typical Bajan lunch at Cutters Bajan Deli, an easy walk from Crane. Crispy fish cakes, and piping hot pumpkin fritters, dipped in Barbados ubiquitous yellow hot sauce, take the edge off owner Roger Goddard's famous rum punch. Or lime with locals at Oistins fish fry, less than a 30-minute ride away. Or head 35 minutes up the coast to Bathsbeba, a local surfers' hangout, and enjoy a Bajan buffet lunch at the Restaurant at Atlantis Hotel.

At the Crane, you have the pick of two of Barbados' top-rated restaurants. At L'Azur Restaurant, famous for its seafood and ocean views, I opted for a char-grilled mahi-mahi with sweet potato gnocchi, garlic-infused wilted greens, corn and green beans, topped with a lobster nantua sauce that lived up to its reputation. From Zagat-rated Zen's Japanese and Thai menu, on another evening we devoured crispy, piping hot tempura vegetables and pickled baby octopus and radish, followed by sushi and sashimi over conversation with Doyle.

Suites at The Private Residences at Crane have generous kitchens, ample storage and stainless steel appliances for those times you want to cook for yourself, or reserve a private chef. All that's left is to set a table under the stars on your private terrace: at ground level, terraces face a private garden and pool; private roof terraces and dining gazebos adjacent to the pool come with penthouses.

The Private Residences at Crane are priced from US\$773,000, and include appliances but not furniture. If you plan to participate in the rental program, you may want to purchase a furniture package from the developer. The second phase of the development, scheduled for completion winter 2018/2019, has one remaining suite for sale. The third phase has 19 condos available.

The Beach Houses, which offer more privacy, have 180-degree views. A minimalist exterior hides generously proportioned living spaces, finished in tones that mimic the view through the floor-to-ceiling glass doors.

Owners can take advantage of a studio lock-off feature for some extra income, while maintaining their privacy. The main living area consists of a generous master suite with an indoor/outdoor soaker tub and two showers surrounded by a private garden. It also has a separate 37-foot-long infinity edge pool and hot tub with ocean view. The studio has an indoor/outdoor shower, a small private terrace and a 19-foot infinity pool with hot tub.

Twenty-five of the beach houses are currently available for fractional, quarter-share or whole ownership for between US\$56,000 and US\$2.95 million, with the front nine scheduled for completion next winter.

Monthly condo fees for a typical two-bedroom unit at The Crane Private Residences start at US\$1,588; fees for a two-bedroom beach house with lock-off begin at US\$2,452. That covers contribution toward resort amenities and services, building insurance, property taxes, utilities, alarm systems, internet, long distance phone calls, cable television, property maintenance and rental pool management services, among other things.

Another benefit you won't find on most Caribbean islands is that Barbados' foreign policy allows access to U.S.-dollar-based mortgages from local offshore banks, many of which will be familiar to Canadians.

Special to National Post

The writer was a guest of The Crane Resort. The organization did not review this article.

