

TRAVEL • HOTELS

Inside the most exclusive but laid-back luxury resort community in the Bahamas

BY RACHEL KING

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The surrounding area supports a number of water activities, including diving, snorkeling, scuba, waterskiing, and windsurfing. There is also a dedicated family pool with rock slides and Treasure Island, a children's water playground.

Summer travel is expected to come back in a huge way this year, and after more than a year of lockdown living, many people are looking to go big when booking vacations.

“After so much time spent at home, travelers will be seeking out sunshine and beach weather in the upcoming months,” says Rory Mitchell, executive managing director for the Americas at global tech strategy firm Criteo. “Our travel recovery report found that for travels departing from the U.S., the top trending international destinations are Puerto Rico, the Bahamas, and the Virgin Islands.”

It doesn't get more luxurious or exclusive than Albany in the Bahamas, a 600-acre private community on New Providence island, just 15 minutes away from Nassau Lynden Pindling International Airport. The investor group that founded the luxury community includes some of the most well-known names in sports, finance, and entertainment, including Tiger Woods, Ernie Els, Justin Timberlake, and Joe Lewis and his private investment organization Tavistock Group.

But Albany is not your typical luxury hotel or resort. Originally conceived in 2004, construction on the initial parcel of property commenced in 2008, with a grand opening in the fourth quarter of 2010.

What makes Albany unique, says Christopher Anand, a founding and managing partner of Albany, is the investment in the amenities. "When you think about a luxury boutique hotel, they usually have 100 bedrooms with some options, like a spa, a pool, and that's it. And that's because they don't have the scale to create a marina and a golf course. What we have is off the charts. The reason we do is because our main business is less the hotel—it's the property development side. People have the option of renting or buying."



Recent new developments at Albany include the completion of two luxury apartment buildings along the private marina, designed by world-renowned Danish architect Bjarke Ingels. Ingels also designed the resort's recording studio, The Sanctuary, which has hosted a number of famous singers.

And precisely what makes Albany so unique—not just in the Bahamas or the Caribbean but just about anywhere—is its function as a community. During the pandemic, part of the reason why Albany was able to remain open up to what Anand describes as 90% of functionality (with just indoor dining and certain indoor amenities closed for a period of time) was because the hotel is really a collection of people's secondary (and for a few, primary) homes.

"We are intentionally confusing," Anand acknowledges, explaining that it is called a luxury resort community because it is not a pure-play luxury hotel in any traditional sense. "Our hotel is really people's properties put into a managed program with a vast array of options." Those options range from multimillion-dollar beachfront cottages and estates to luxury residences in apartment-style buildings with anywhere from two to eight bedrooms.

Essentially, residents buy property within the Albany grounds as they would anywhere else—but they have the option to sublet their homes while away and recoup some money at the same time. And visitors can rent an apartment or entire home on a nightly or weekly (or even monthly) basis like they would at any other hotel or resort.



Inspired by traditional Bahamian architecture, the villas offer three to six bedrooms, spanning up to 6,000 square feet, featuring courtyard-style entrances with private pools and gardens.

Since March 2020, with so many people having to work remotely, many residents and club members remained at the gated luxury community with their families for the duration of the pandemic, balancing both working from “home” and enjoying the multitude of outdoor activities available at their doorsteps. A number of financial institutions (that cannot be named because of privacy concerns) also temporarily relocated select teams to Albany so they could continue to work together in an isolated community.

“The pandemic was scary for everyone,” Anand says. “Never before in history has a business literally by government decree had its revenues go to zero. It’s why a lot of hospitality businesses suffered. That was no different for us. Things were scary. What happened was that we’re a real estate development—we had no choice but to stay open.”

Albany became what Anand describes as “a self-sufficient bubble” being that there is a grocery store on property, everyone has their own kitchen, and food was available from the restaurants for takeout (and later, outdoor dining). There’s also a financial center on-site with state-of-the-art videoconferencing technology and abundant Wi-Fi all over the estate. “What ended up happening is more homeowners stayed during this period and influenced previous guests to hang out here for months,” Anand says.



With open floor plans and flexible bedroom configurations, marina residences come in both modern and classic profiles.

While most indoor spaces were shuttered during the pandemic, the gym remained open thanks to a rigorous cleaning protocol and access by reservation only. And that's also motivated by the strong interest in fitness and improving one's well-being among guests and residents. In normal times, the fitness center—a 15,000-square-foot facility with specific rooms dedicated to cardio, CrossFit, boxing, yoga, and more—is open 24/7.

The ethos at the Nexus Wellness Collective is promoting well-being—living longer and better—by improving where and how we live, work, and thrive through a series of advanced wellness offerings from diagnostics, biotherapies, fitness, wellness retreats and camps, nutrition, mind and body, spa treatments, and aesthetics.

The Wellness Collective launched four years ago, but it is not limited to programs and services solely at the wellness center, but rather it has permeated through other sites and amenities. All of the restaurants, for example, have had their menus overhauled and now offer a bevy of meatless and plant-based options.



Albany hosts a number of tournaments among members, as well as the Hero World Challenge, a golf tournament hosted by Tiger Woods, each December.

Not surprisingly after the past year, promoting stronger immunity is a popular theme, which instructors and nutritionists at the wellness center say starts from being in great mental and physical shape. “Beauty and longevity are the future. We want to be around as long as we can,” says spa and wellness director Christine Carey.

In that mindset, the ReBoot program is best described as resetting one’s habits. Held three to four times a year with an average maximum of 12 participants per session, the four-day regimen is described by the program’s directors as both intensive...but also not intensive.

The core principle is movement—whether it be bursts of intensive exercise or periods of stretching and walking. It’s a lot of movement. “Humans are designed to move,” Anand posits. “So the ReBoot program is about being active five to six hours per day. It’s not so crazy when you think about it. It is crazy if you ask someone to work out for five to six hours a day.”

Participants follow a structured plant-based menu and are dissuaded from drinking alcohol for the duration. The first two days are especially packed, followed by a rest day with lighter activities (like local sightseeing and a boat ride) so that both the mind and body can recover, and then participants are reenergized to continue.

And while ReBoot is designed to jump-start the metabolism (participants are said to usually lose between five to

10 pounds by the end of the program), there is a social element that could help begin filling a great void after a year of quarantine and social isolation. “It’s quite fun to do with other people,” Anand explains. “You spend a lot of time walking and talking. You won’t come out of this without making a few new friends and probably losing some weight.”



The lighted Har-Tru clay tennis courts are equipped with PlaySight technology, a multicamera, full HD video recording setup tracking of live action, instant video replay, and live streaming of all practices and matches.

But perhaps the greatest amenity at Albany is one that is not tangible. It’s also the unwritten golden rule: the respect for privacy. While this is a place where a guest or resident might see anyone from a world leader to a Hollywood legend at the next table for breakfast, it is also generally understood that everyone is due the same courtesy and, frankly, the right to be left alone as anyone else present.

Jason Callender, a partner at Albany, underscores that despite how exclusive Albany is, there aren’t velvet ropes or other hurdles that one must jump through to gain access like similar affluent luxury resorts or communities one might find elsewhere in the Caribbean or even the Hamptons or the South of France. Callender notes there are only a few rules: namely one has to be able to afford it, and guests must generally maintain a sense of decorum. Albany is generally more family-oriented, whether it be retirees, couples, or young families (and there are childcare options as well as a school for elementary through secondary levels on-site).

All residents must also pay an annual membership. In 2015, Albany’s founders created a parent company, called Nexus, which was designed to offer residents a more private club-like experience—not just in the Bahamas but also when they return home. New York City is the first hotspot for the program, with a private club (including a restaurant, a spa, and a fitness center) in downtown Manhattan, a private lounge at Teterboro Airport (a launch pad for the private planes of the local elite) in New Jersey, and a new residence building opening in New York’s

Tribeca neighborhood. Albany's founders say that there are plans to expand Nexus to more metropolitan areas in the near future.

"We've always looked to our business this way: The people who own it are some of the most successful business athletes and people in the world. They are not motivated by money; they're motivated to be the best at what they do, and that's what binds us in the shareholder group," Anand says. "When we think about Albany, what started out as one thing has evolved. There wasn't a salon or a shopping market, there wasn't a financial center. It's an evolution of a journey of our ownership group. Part of being the best is not thinking you're the best; being the best is constantly pushing for excellence and constantly asking the question everyday how can we be better. That is the DNA of Albany."



Blending the expectations of a luxury resort with the cozy feeling of being at home, Albany's stand-alone properties come in three distinctive styles: beachfront, ocean view, and club villas.

Resort accommodations at Albany start at \$3,000 per night. Permanent residences start at \$5 million, and previous transactions have gone as high as \$75 million for a property. The majority of residences are already owned, but there are openings in the marina residences and the option for custom-built homes around the property. Albany is also developing a number of new homes along the outskirts of the new equestrian center, expected to open in 2022.

The Bahamas (like the rest of the Caribbean) is going into the low season during the summer months, with the high season starting in November amid the winter holidays.

"Generally speaking, things are pretty expensive because of the nature of our hotel," Anand says, noting that rates in summer go as low as \$3,000 per night to \$50,000 to \$60,000 per night in the high season. "That's two ends of

the spectrum. On average, most people should expect to spend \$5,000 to \$7,000 per night for a four-bedroom property.”



Guests and residents at Albany can rely on a full-service concierge program, with a butler service and 24-hour security.

For U.S. citizens, reaching the Bahamas is much easier once again as the commonwealth recently lifted its mandatory quarantine period for all incoming visitors. Fully vaccinated travelers past the two-week mark after their second shot (or one dose of Johnson & Johnson) are not required to quarantine nor must they submit a record of a recent negative COVID-19 test. But vaccinated travelers do need to file (online) for a travel health visa (which includes submitting a copy or photo of your COVID vaccination record) and pay a \$40 processing fee.

It's much more laborious for non-vaccinated visitors, akin to traveling anywhere during the peak periods of the pandemic before the vaccine rollout. Along with submitting the travel health visa application and payment, non-vaccinated travelers must supply a negative COVID test record taken within the five days before arrival. Then, if the visit is longer than five days, these travelers must undergo a rapid antigen test on the fifth day after arrival. Quarantine periods are required only if the test comes back positive for COVID.

And according to CDC regulations, anyone going to/returning to the U.S. must still provide proof of a negative COVID test taken within 72 hours before arrival back in the States. COVID testing is available on-site for drop-in visits at Albany's wellness center.

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