

POLO & MORE

BARBADOS 2009



25 minutes away... 3 square miles

By Gregory B. Gallagher Photos image © mussa studiolivio.it



The Grenadines Estate.



Amrita Spa



A beautiful sunset view from one of the Restaurants

Floating through cumulous mountain clouds above a Caribbean horizon, I am feeling somewhat like a character out of a 1950's Humphrey Bogart film. I am not sure exactly where I am, there are six strangers occupying the plane with me, the pilot and I exchanged suspicious glances before take-off, and the sun is setting quickly. A rainbow of colours bounce free form off every possible surface in my field of vision, and I decide to go with the wonderful distractions and dismiss any worries.

I peer out the windows like a wide-eyed child and I am oddly at peace as we dip and glide gracefully through the peek-a-boo veil of lights generated by the sunset. On my way to the Raffles Resort Canouan Island, visiting the Trump International Golf Club, trying out the award winning Amrita Spa, touring The Grenadines Estate villas, and yachting to the Tobago Cays in a piloted catamaran. But for now, I am lost among the clouds, caring less about where we are headed than how it feels to be aloft.

An impressive welcoming committee issue me a personal golf cart for the duration of my stay at Raffles Resort Canouan Island. After exploring my hillside villa for a few minutes, not quite believing all this space is solely for moi, I try valiantly to steer my golf cart back through the looming darkness, on the opposite side of the road to which I am used to driving, heading towards a beach front feast.

I make my way to the long, waterfront table strewn with candles and fresh flower blossoms. Long torches in the sand

stand sentry at the each end of the table, while remnants of the sun strike a dramatic red finale across the distant horizon. The band plays soft jazz alongside linen-covered tables packed with ornate seafood platters, fresh-grilled meats to order, catch-of-the-day, sliced tropical fruits and a dessert area showing mounds of chocolate cakes and other caloric mysteries.

Canouan is the Carib-Indian name for "island of the turtles" and I make a point of being up early the following morning to explore the island's flora and fauna with fresh eyes. I run into one of the local staff outside my villa, we greet each other and talk about my plan to sightsee on his island. He offers to chauffeur me through the hills and bays of his home and I accept. He immediately heads to the highest point of the island, Mount Royal, where I can see the Trump Casino Privée perched above the water. I also spot several of the namesake turtles posing on the lawn.

We can easily see the islands of nearby Mustique, Union Island, Mayreau, Petit Saint Vincent, Prune Island and Tobago Cays, one of the best diving spots in all of the Caribbean.

Canouan Island is one of the 32 islands belonging to the nation of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, southwest of Barbados about one hundred nautical miles. The island encompasses 1800 acres of wooded and hilly land, a coral reef, sandy beaches and until recently was relatively unknown except to sailors and fishermen.

Previous page top: One of the private villas overlooking the bay.

Below: Serene and relaxing; a view from one of the premium rooms.

*Just a short hop
away from
Barbados,
Raffles Canouan
is a little piece of
heaven on earth.*



The Personality Suite.

As recently as 1990, Canouan Island had one single jetty, limited road, no electricity, no telephones, no refrigerators, and only a primitive ferry to transport the few residents off this bit of raw real estate. When the initial American resort management company self-destructed, the owners' bounced back by signing the renowned Singapore-based Raffles Hotel Group. The resort's current General Manager, Gilbert Madhaven, is the epitome of invisible service, as he makes guests feel like they are visiting an old friend.

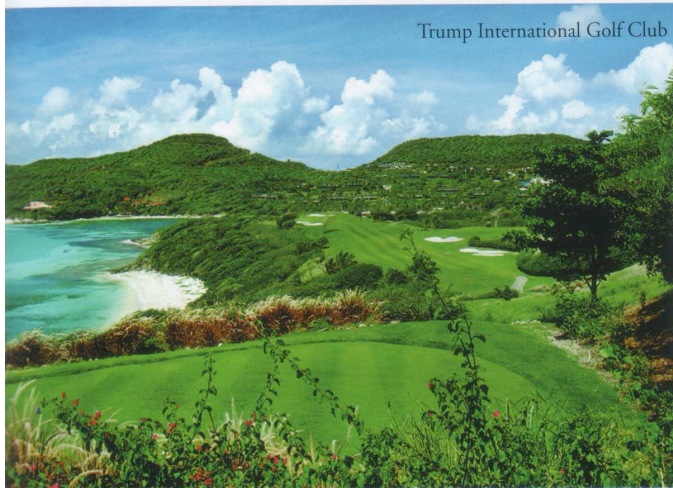
This sort of understated service finesse continues throughout the resort. The hilltop La Varenne speaks of another time, perhaps an easier epoch, where visiting, dining, conversation and elegance had nothing to prove. An evening soirée spent dining on fresh creations, culled from the garden and the sea, or imported from the finest purveyors on the planet, tends to cause guests to talk to themselves.

I know it caused me wonder aloud how it was possible to have such an extensive menu in such an out-of-the-way place. It was like dining in the finest eateries of London, Paris or Rome, but with no traffic, noise, pollution, crowds, dust or parking problems. I retire to the Trump Casino Privée late in the evening to watch a group of boisterous French visitors at the Blackjack tables and enjoy a Cuban cigar on the terrace overlooking the bay.

The next morning is dedicated to golf, and exploring probably the most challenging course anywhere in the Caribbean. Designed by famed course architect Jim Fazio, the Trump International Golf Course has the fascinating idiosyncrasy of being a mountain course where you always shoot downwards to the pin. This may sound like a bit of a gift to some, but as onsite golf pro Simon Blanshard says, "Even the best players find this course a challenge to their abilities." The first ten holes lay inside a volcanic crater bordering the Raffles Resort, while the rest are located on the opposite side of the island, spread over spectacular hilltop terrain. The 13th green will distract even the most focused player with dreamy vistas in all directions.

I then get a chance to inspect one of the private villas, to see for myself what many in the business are calling the most complete residential villa packages in the Caribbean. As we tour the site, it becomes amply clear; every possible detail in these villas is top drawer.

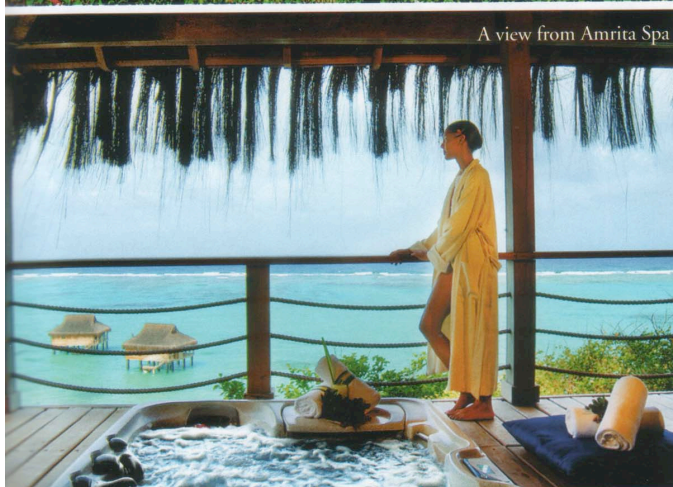
Combined with original design elements and painstaking craftsmanship, the result equals perhaps the best Caribbean villa buy anywhere. Every one of the Golf, Marina and Beach estates includes the Raffles Resort five-star amenities, beach access, tennis, water sports and full membership at Trump International Golf Club, which includes dining privileges at



Trump International Golf Club



Dining on the beach at Raffles Resort



A view from Amrita Spa



Premium Suite bedroom

four gourmet restaurants. There are also facilities provided for yacht servicing and storage by Moorings, located on the other end of the island and integrated into the Tamarind Beach & Yacht Club.

My fondest memory of Canouan Island though, will always be the day trip to Tobago Cays, spent with Nicola and Phil Jones aboard their catamaran Splendid Adventurer, combined with a magical massage at the Amrita Spa after the trip. I could hardly find my way back to my oversized villa I was so blissed-out from diving in the Tobago Cays, and then being under the talented hands of the Amrita Spa masseuse.

As I reluctantly leave this friendly paradise, I see Canouan from a very altered point-of-view than when I arrived. The ownership adopting this bird-shaped island and inviting the citizenry to collaborate with them in creating an island oasis, a unique destination for ultra luxury vacations, golf retreats,

weddings and water sports. The real legacy of introducing the populace to new trades, sustainable tools, environmental standards, and a global culture, which will influence this nation long into the future. ■

How to Get There

Raffles Flight Concierge Service features both the luxurious Raffles Jet service from many islands throughout the Caribbean and Raffles Air-Limousine Service connecting from Barbados, Martinique, St.Lucia and Grenada. Commercial access to Canouan is currently available via American Eagle from San Juan, & Grenadines Airways from Barbados. Private Jet facilities also available (runway 5900ft)

For further information contact local agents Altman Real Estate. Tel: +1 246 435-3537 (South) +1 246 432-0840 (West) Email: realestate@aaaltman.com

Raffles Canouan at the 2008 Barbados Open.

Apart from the polo, the afternoon was all about luxury and glamour, as first time sponsors Raffles Canouan, whose team was in the final, hosted a lavish VIP Marquee for 250 invited guests. With thousands of dollars worth of imported flowers decorating the vast marquee, chefs and entertainment flown in from Canouan, and a full complement of staff on site to ensure that everything was "Canouan" ready, so that guests got a brief taste of what a visit to this piece of paradise would be like. The marquee was exquisitely decorated by Events Unusual to not only reflect the Resort's chic style, but to compliment the gourmet delights being served within. The Food, a cornucopia of Asian delights from Sushi to Thai to Chinese tickled the taste buds of the discerning guests, and for those with a sweet tooth there was an extensive desert island. The food just kept coming and coming and the champagne just kept flowing and flowing, and at this point it seemed as

though the polo was going to be a side-show in a rather elaborately staged performance choreographed by the Resort's General Manager Gilbert Madhavan and his wife, who were most gracious hosts.



Raffles VIP tent photos by Manty Cooper