

LONG HAUL

The Abaco Club

This rising star of the picture-postcard Bahamas is poised to get even better

It's not hard to understand why Christopher Columbus ordered his crew to drop anchor when he stumbled upon The Bahamas back in 1492.

The real question is: how did he ever convince those hardy sailors to leave? This is Paradise with a capital P.

It was paradise way back then, and it remains so today – especially when you eschew the glitz and bustle of Nassau and make your way to the archipelago's more unspoiled islands.

The warm, gentle climate and beautiful, natural environment found in The Bahamas have long made these islands a dream destination for people from all over

the world, who come to shrug off the cold shoulder of winter and warm their bones.

Here, buffeted by the fragrant tropical breezes, all the cares of the world just seem to evaporate – to be replaced by hours of splashing around in crystal-clear waters, enjoying rum drinks accented by exotic fruits, sampling seafood so fresh it's still flapping, and partaking in all manner of holiday leisure activities.

And of all the wonderful getaway spots in this sunny part of the world, there's one that does the paradise thing just a little better than the rest: The Abaco Club on Winding Bay. For years a Ritz-Carlton Destination Club, The Abaco Club is now

owned and operated by Southworth – one of the world's leading resort and residential real estate firms.

What was a magnificent property to begin with is now in the process of becoming even better.

"The Abaco Club has everything money can't buy," said David Southworth, President and CEO of Southworth Development.

"It's a gorgeous setting, with a well thought-out master plan and a passionate club membership. We're very excited to be here and look forward to taking this amazing facility to an even higher level."

What makes The Abaco Club such an ►



amazing facility? For starters, its one-of-a-kind setting. The Club is located on the most charming of The Bahamas' Outer Islands – Great Abaco – and is graced by a 2.5-mile powder-soft beach that stretches as far as the eye can see.

But perhaps the club's greatest charm is that while you can visit and avail yourself of its many amenities, it's really not a resort.

There's no towering beachfront hotel at The Abaco Club.

In fact, there's no hotel at all.

Instead, you have your choice of the luxurious, freestanding cabanas and charming pastel-coloured cottages that are spread throughout the property. For a night – or a week or month – you can enjoy The Abaco Club just as the club members and homeowners do.

And like Columbus's crew, chances are you will never want to leave.

The Abaco Club was created to be a true sporting club. Its Scottish-style links golf course, designed by Englishman Donald Steel and Scotsman Tom Mackenzie, is a great test and has perennially been ranked as the No.1 course in The Bahamas.

It offers quite a bit of elevation change,

which is unusual for an island course, and the overall design has been described as "roll-in-the-haystack good".

There are pot bunkers everywhere, tumbling fairways, and the green complexes that approach shots must contend with would not be out of place at North Berwick or Muirfield. Hardly surprising when you consider the calibre of the architects: Steel

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is an icon of British golf with a stellar career as a player, writer and architect; Mackenzie is co-owner of the firm the R&A now uses to revise the courses on The Open rota.

Many holes offer jaw-dropping views of the dazzling blue sea, making the job of concentrating on your shotmaking an exercise in determination.

For those who think that holidays in the tropics cannot include superb golf, The Abaco Club provides a hearty rebuttal. When you hole out after 18 holes here, you'll know you've been in a battle.

As you'd expect, the club also offers water sports galore – from kayaking, sailing and snorkeling to bonefishing and deep-sea fishing.

Some of the best deep-sea angling in the world can be found within minutes of the club's shoreline, where trophy marlin, wahoo, mahi-mahi and yellowfin tuna await. Spending time on the tennis courts

or in the fitness centre are other invigorating options, as is visiting the club's luxurious spa.

And all the while, the pristine white sand beach beckons to you every day, just waiting to be explored.

Cap it all off with an open-air breakfast or lunch at Buster's Beach Bar, or by sitting down and enjoying the exquisite local cuisine offered daily at The Cliff House restaurant, and you have the makings of a holiday that you'll want to never end.

Fortunately, for those with the means to

purchase a home or club membership at The Abaco Club, it doesn't have to.

The residences for sale at the club are magnificent, and come in a variety of shapes and sizes ranging from cozy cabanas and charming cottages to stately villas and grand oceanfront estates.

Each home is within steps of the beach, and each is meticulously appointed with all of life's necessities.

Wake to the sound of crashing waves, stroll to the golf course or spa, or just relax on your private patio and look out over the sparkling, turquoise sea while the feisty Abaco parrots chirp their warm morning welcome.

It's an atmosphere of quiet sophistication, where you, your family and your friends can enjoy total relaxation when you want it — and a wealth of wonderful activities when the spirit so moves you.

"The Abaco Club is truly a world unto itself," said Kristi Hull, the club's real estate sales director. "It's an enclave that offers the perfect antidote to modern-day life."

"People from all over the world become club members and buy homes here because they fall in love with The Abaco Club and

want to establish a permanent connection to this place.

"They want to be able to return year after year to enjoy the beauty and tranquility of the club with family and friends. And they make new friends here, too – people from every corner of the world who share their appreciation for the incredibly special experiences this club has to offer. It's a completely unique place – and one that sells itself at a glance."

Off-property, the Abacos offer all manner of other diversions. A few minutes down a narrow, sandy road brings you to Little Harbour, where you'll find Pete's Pub, a lively but low-key spot that's famous for its rum 'drink of the day' and for serving the world's freshest seafood.

Nearby Hope Town on Elbow Cay is a beehive of shopping and dining activity, while the many other cays (small sandy islands on the surface of the coral reef) surrounding Great Abaco – Treasure Cay and Great Guana Cay being two favourites – are popular mingling spots for visitors and locals alike.

A stopover at Nipper's on Great Guana Cay is de rigeur for any Abaco explorer.

The frozen Nippers and Sunday pig roast at this celebrated beach bar are reason enough on their own for you to make your way to this part of the world.

Even if you have to sail the ocean blue in a dinghy and risk a bout of scurvy to get there. ■

QUICK GUIDE

THE CLIMATE: It's absolutely lovely and hardly varies all year round. Between September and May, the temperature averages 21-24°C while the rest of the year is a bit warmer – higher humidity and temperatures between 27 and 29°C.

GETTING THERE: Great Abaco's Marsh Harbour International Airport (MHH) is served by several airlines, including American, Bahamas Air and Silver Airways. You can make connections to Abaco in Miami, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach, Nassau, and seasonally in Orlando.

TIME DIFFERENCE: GMT -5
MORE INFORMATION: Visit www.theabacoclub.com