

houserules

BARBADOS MAY HAVE SOME OF THE MOST CELEBRATED HOTELS IN THE CARIBBEAN BUT LOOK BEYOND THE PAPARAZZI HANGOUTS AND YOU WILL DISCOVER A SECLUDED PARADISE WHERE PRIVACY IS ASSURED AND PERSONAL SERVICE IS A PLEASURE. NICK MCGRATH EXPERIENCES THE VERY INDIVIDUAL CHARM OF THE HOUSE AT TARAMIND COVE.

As its name suggests, The House is not like other Barbadian hotels. It may share the same dust-fine St James sand and bathe in the same cleansing crystal clear waters of the Caribbean Sea but that's where the similarities end. You won't find coach parties or hankies on heads. You won't find Man United shirts and you won't find raised voices. In fact you won't even find a reception. Just laid back, bleached-white calm with views to die for and cuisine to savour.

Literally spilling onto Paynes Bay beach on the island's west coast, The House is so inconspicuous from the outside you'd barely know it was

there. Set back only a few yards from the small road meandering its way from capital city Bridgetown, first impressions betray the treasures within. Beyond the unspectacular white walled entrance and the slowly opening wooden gates lies a low key paradise of candlelight and minimalism.

Crossing the moonlit water-lily lake over a dark wooden drawbridge you'll arrive through trailing bougainvillea into an immaculately designed chill out room. Giant blue pots with flickering flares dapple the black and white prints lining the whitewashed walls. Perfectly positioned deep slung sofas with richly coloured textiles surround what must be the longest shin-height coffee table on the island. With the poshest chess set. There's no rush to check you in, merely a welcome punch – poured not thrown – and an introduction to your own personal ambassador who'll do whatever you ask, whenever you ask, as many times as you want – just so as long as you're a House guest.



After an eight hour flight and further 35 minute transfer from the island's Grantly Adams Airport top on the list of arrival tonics is an unmissable local massage courtesy of The House's expert masseuse who, if she doesn't already glow in moonlight as a Whoopie Goldberg double, should seriously consider getting an agent. Pummelled to within an inch of my jet lag it was time for a welcome meal in The House's premiere restaurant, Daphne's – sister diner to the Chelsea set's favoured posh snack stop. The food, as expected, was exceptional with the Herculean barbecued fresh lobster deservedly taking most of the plaudits. The accompanying soundtrack of waves breaking on sand made the cafe society charm of Kings Road in summer seem like the Old Kent Road in January, and as a bedtime lullaby it certainly beats sirens and drunks.

Woke by the sound of ambassadors sweeping stray sand from the wooden decks linking the quartet of subtly designed plunge pools, I took a dawn

walk before enjoying the sunrise and a black coffee by the shore. Barely before the first bead of sweat had contemplated making an appearance on my forehead my telepathic ambassador was cooling my temples with a gentle spray from a natty little ice-cold Evian can. Nice touch, and enough to make you forsake the island's plentiful riches in favour of some seriously five star sunbathing. With Gin and Tonics arriving in time with the waves, the beach lounging won without a struggle, but not before I'd realised that double Gordon's and waterskiing go together like George Bush and the UN.

No matter, a sunset siesta later and the island's – if the not the Caribbean's – culinary zenith was upon us. Where Daphne's offered cordon bleu cuisine in sandals and jeans, The Cliff provides a high time at high tide. Overlooking a staggeringly beautiful bay a little further north from Taramind Cove, The Cliff's location is the stuff of fairytales and, I'd guess, thousands of marriage proposals since it

opened in 1995. And the food – inspired by internationally renowned chef Paul Owen – more than matches the setting. One word of warning, visit on your first night and you'll be picking holes in restaurants you'd usually be raving about. Much like The House in fact. Book a two centre visit with The House as your first course and I suspect the second course will leave a nasty taste in your mouth. Admittedly not for shallow pockets, it's worth passing on the starters for.

BARBADOS: HOW TO BOOK

Exsus Travel offers a seven night stay at The House from £1,329 per person. The price, based on two sharing an ocean view room on a B&B basis, includes BA flights, taxes and transfers. For more information or to request a brochure call Exsus on 0207 292 5050 or email travel@exsus.com (www.exsus.com) Exsus Travel is a UK tour operator specialising in luxury holidays to Latin America and the Caribbean.