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PICTURED: ALBANY, THE BAHAMAS



A piece of **paradise**

There's luxury – and then there's Albany, the new residential resort for the super-rich in the Bahamas. Tom Otley sees how the other half live

If you stay in a lot of hotels for work, you may prefer to steer clear of them during your holiday. A second home can be a good investment, but often isn't trouble free, hence the rise of the "resort community".

At their worst, they are disguised retirement homes around a golf course. At their best, they are Albany. Set in 242 hectares on the island of New Providence in the Bahamas, it sets a new standard for luxury, yet manages to avoid being ostentatious – no mean feat when its marina has 90-metre superyachts moored.

To begin with, while this isn't specifically a golf resort, it certainly has all the facilities. The 18-hole par-72, 7,400-yard championship course, designed by Ernie Els, has dunes and water features, a 400-yard driving range, a short game area with chipping and putting greens, and a state-of-the-art swing performance centre – reason enough for professionals such as Justin Rose, Tiger Woods and Ian Poulter to have places here.

In reality, there are plenty of courses in Florida with similar high-end offerings, but what makes Albany appealing is that the golf is only one aspect of the package, and a very modern one at that.

Take the focus on health – people who have made money want to make sure they live as long as possible to enjoy it. Most resorts have gyms, but in general they aren't much good. The one at Albany is outstanding – a series of large buildings stuffed with the latest cardio equipment and weights (the biggest room is almost 1,400 sqm). There are yoga and spin studios, a boxing ring, and a kind of outdoor courtyard area for Crossfit with large tractor tyres, climbing ropes and chin-up bars with bands for those still struggling with this extreme fitness regime.

The buildings are gathered around a dedicated lap pool, separate from the other family and adult-only pools, which are a five-minute golf buggy ride away. Racquet sports include tennis courts – one hard and five Har-Tru (clay) – and two outdoor Padel courts.

If you want to go for a jog or cycle around the resort, the trails run on the other side of a high hedge from the road taken by occasional vehicles and more frequent buggies. It means walkers, runners, cyclists and riders (there is an equestrian centre as well) can be kept separate from one another. No more worries about the kids going out on the bikes – they have free reign, and there is an organised programme of activities.

Younger visitors can also enjoy the Treasure Island-themed waterpark, while around the corner is Azul pool and bar, which, with its cabanas and music playing through the day, is like the fashionable South Beach resorts of Miami, complete with famous faces relaxing around the pool.

Left: Albany's beach

ESCAPE TO... The Bahamas



The resort takes its name from Albany House, the historic pink beachside mansion that is now home to Albany's fine-dining restaurant, Aviva, and Vesper bar and lounge. Originally owned by French filmmaker and *Inspector Gadget* creator Jean Chalopin, the residence is also featured in *Casino Royale*.

The plan is for there to be 350 residences, from villas and beach properties to ones looking out on to the golf course or the equestrian facilities. Some 100 are now finished and sold, with another 40 under construction. Sizes range from 121 sqm to 1,765 sqm, and the style differs not only internally, as owners stamp their own personality on the furnishings, but also externally, with Albany using renowned international architects and designers such as Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), Robert A M Stern, the late Charles Gwathmey, and HKS Architects.

Construction was going on when I visited, yet apart from some hoardings, it was unnoticeable, and certainly didn't disturb the peace around the pool. At maximum capacity, when finished, there could be as many as 1,800 people here, although in practice, even in high season, it is unlikely to ever get close to that.

The aim is to make the place feel lived in, with a vibrant community, and that has happened initially by opening up the leisure facilities to some locals (150 social memberships were sold), and also by allowing owners to rent their residences. It means the restaurant and bars are kept busy, quality stays high and the resort remains exclusive without having that absent "second home" feel.

The deepwater 71-berth marina helps with that, since the boats come in for either short or long stays. It also has excellent security – the Bahamas has had some high-profile problems with crime in recent years, although staff are at pains to point out that these are isolated incidents. Still, the measures taken at Albany are discreet yet reassuring.

Clockwise from above left:
Courtyard pool; marina; Albany House; golf course; beach residence

Another challenge with resorts in the Bahamas and the Caribbean is the standard of service, which can fall short of that in other regions worldwide. At Albany that isn't a problem, partly because of training, partly because the staff – currently 350 – are treated well (they have their own on-site gym), paid well, and come to know the guests, some of whom live here for many months at a time.

There are plans for a financial centre with conference rooms and luxury retailers, floors two to five being reserved for international banking institutions, trust companies and family offices. A medical centre is planned for cosmetic and plastic surgery, along with a sports medicine facility. In the meantime, there is a large spa and wellness centre.

Lynden Pindling International airport, which is only a 15-minute drive from the resort, has been vastly improved. If flying into the US, the pre-clearance (if necessary) takes place at Nassau, so you land in the US as a domestic passenger. There are also several airstrips for private jets.

The resort recognises that to get people to buy a property they will first have to experience the place, so offers stays that give a taste of what life at Albany is like. If you decide to buy, the cost of the stay is refunded from the purchase price, and if you have bought off-plan, you get some weeks in a similar existing property to use until it's ready.

All of this comes with the tax advantages of the Bahamas – no income tax, no capital gains tax and a single property tax based on the value of the property bought (on Albany, lots start at US\$1.5 million, and residences at US\$4 million). With a second home like this, it might be worth considering selling the first one and moving in full-time.

■ A four-bedroom residence sleeping eight to ten people costs US\$3,000 per night plus taxes in May-October, rising to US\$5,000 November-April. albanybahamas.com

