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Relax to the max!

The Abaco Club has perfected the art of leisure

By Paul Knowles

Time spent at The Abaco Club on Winding Bay tends to meld together into a very pleasant, mellow wash of relaxation. It's just that kind of place.

But there were a number of moments during my days on Abaco that stand out as appropriate symbols of the place.

The most notable probably took place on my last night at the Club. David Southworth, Founder and CEO of Southworth Development, which owns the Abaco Club, was dining with our group, and called me over. "Paul, here's another Canadian I'd like you to meet. He owns a property here," and he introduced me to David MacNaughton. That's David MacNaughton, Canada's Ambassador to the United States, by the way. We chatted a bit; I learned a lot. Including gaining a sense of the kind of place Abaco Club really is – a get-away for people seeking a retreat from busy and often stressful lives.

The Abaco Club on Winding Bay is, not surprisingly, located on Abaco, one of 700 islands (30 inhabited) that make up the Bahamas. You fly over a surprising number of them as you come into to land at the airport at Marsh Harbour.

Abaco Club is "a private sporting club", so the only people there are property owners, "international members" who have bought membership that allows them to rent accommodation and use the facilities, and a limited number of visitors who are allowed to visit a limited number of times – then it's time to choose to buy or say goodbye.

Another noteworthy moment happened on evening as I was relaxing in the infinity pool overlooking the bay – yes, life is hard – and two American couples joined me in the pool. They were international members, and could not say enough great things about how relaxed they found themselves to be the moment they got to the Club. They laughed about the lack of nightlife – although there is "Rake 'n' Scrape" entertainment some evenings at the beachfront Flippers Beach Bar – but that's not what they were there for. I saw them later, dining at the excellent Cliff House restaurant, also on site, with superb service (the staff find a perfect balance between professionalism and Bahamian warmth), great cuisine, and fine wines. That is what they were there for!



And maybe the golf. The Abaco Club golf course is astonishing – it has hosted Web-com tournaments (for golfers vying to move up to the PGA Tour), and golfers like Darrin Clarke (who has a home here), Brandt Snedeker, and Rickie Fowler can often be found on the course.

I didn't threaten any course records, but managed to maintain some modicum of golfing pride... but mostly, I was enraptured by the sheer beauty of the course. It covers the width of the island, so you play some holes along each shoreline, with amazing views of the Atlantic. On the eastern side, your tee shot is accompanied by the crash of breakers against the rocks! If that is not beauty enough for you, a design change in the course a few years ago brought it near to perfection – all of the tall scrubby rough was taken out, replaced by white sand waste areas. When you stand on the tee block and look down virtually any fairway, you see a work of abstract art – white expanses curving into and out of green fairways, with palm trees and occasionally flowering tropic plants. It is frankly gorgeous. And makes playing out of the rough a lot easier to take!

Golf is not the only sport on offer, here. This is a hotbed of sport fishing, especially bonefish, permit and tarpon, and of boating. You can take your boat to some great outside-the-club spots, like the Firefly Sunset Resort on Elbow Cay, or Pete's Pub & Gallery (home of the Blaster – don't ask, just order and drink). Pete's is actually on Abaco, at Little Harbour, so you can also get there by car (driving on the left, mind you, although the steering wheel is probably on the left as well).

There is also a wonderful spa at the Abaco Club.

By the way – you don't have to golf in order to drive a golf cart. In fact, each guest accommodation comes with its own golf cart, bearing the name of the guest, for your use as long as you are at the Club. (There are also mysterious sprites called golf cart fairies who appear in the night, or while you are dining, and turn your cart around so you are ready to simply drive away).



Speaking again of the staff – which may be the best feature of the place – I learned from experience that if you ask directions from a staff member, he or she does not tell you – they show you, making sure you find your way before they return to their other duties.

Apart from our very own ambassador, there's a decided Canadian connection at the Abaco Club. Several of the properties are owned by Canadians. Director of Sales is Canadian Kristi Hull. The television feeds in all the accommodations (which range from lovely, high-end cottage-like cabanas to luxurious homes) include all the Canadian channels.

In fact, over drinks the first night I was at Abaco, much of the conversation was about hockey. Which is quite easy to take, under palm trees, beside the ocean, with a rum punch in your hand and sandals on your feet. The best of all worlds! ☒

For more info: <https://theabacoclub.com>.