

SLEEPOVER » MARLEY FAMILY VILLA IN THE BAHAMAS TURNED INTO LUXURY PROPERTY » BY JUDITH RITTER

High-end hideaway has reggae beat

MARLEY RESORT AND SPA

Cable Beach, Nassau, Bahamas;
242 327 1662;
www.marleyresort.com

ROOMS AND RATES

16 suites with rates from \$495 to \$1,150 (U.S.) a night in low season and \$650 to \$1,350 a night in high season.

Who would have associated reggae artist Bob Marley, the revolutionary singer-poet, political outlaw and man of the common people with an exclusive high-end resort? And a resort not on his celebrated native island of Jamaica, but on Nassau, a nearby but not nearly as rock-in' place. Four decades after the politically steamy sixties, that's exactly what we have. The Marley family – Bob's widow, Rita, and the couple's musical offspring – decided to turn their private vacation villa in the Bahamas into a 16-suite luxury lodging that is part entrepreneurial adventure and part homage to the music legend.

LOCATION This meticulously restored 19th-century Caribbean villa has shades of muted ochre, burnt orange and pale lime. Surrounded by lush royal poinciana, banana and flamboyant trees, the resort overlooks a cerulean Caribbean Sea and a six-kilometre white-sand stretch of Cable Beach. Just 15 minutes from the resort's gates is Nassau Harbour, surrounded by the historic pink government buildings of the former British colony, three 19th-century forts, a museum of piracy and one of the largest casinos in the Caribbean.

AMBIENCE Though the resort is on a main road, once you're through its ornate iron gates there is an unmistakable intimacy. The colonial-style hotel is a sanctuary for visitors, much as it was for the Marley family. "We wanted it to feel like it did when we all lived in it, cozy and elegant," says daughter Stephanie. The resort epitomizes "mellow," not surprisingly so considering its owners. "When we were deciding what vibe we wanted for



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our resort, we sat down with a list of my father's songs and decided that the tune that most describes the mood we were after was 'there's a natural mystic blowing through the air,' " she said, referring to her father's oft-cited song, *Natural Mystic*.

CLIENTELE With the Marleys' musical connections, it's no surprise the resort attracts well-known artists. The romantic old-world Caribbean ambience, level of privacy and the *One Love* honeymoon suite (named after one of his most famous songs) make the resort a magnet for romantics, too. And while ordinary suburban folks on a splurge who can't carry a tune are welcome, don't expect much in the way of entertainment for the playpen or playground set.

DESIGN While the integrity of the villa is maintained, there is a definite, though muted, feeling of Jamaican, Rastafarian and reggae aesthetic. The orange, green and sunflower walls are patina washes of lime-based paints that give the

sandstone surfaces a mineral-like lustre and textural feel. Throughout the resort, dark wooden doors with discreet carvings of phrases such as "The legend lives" and a small lounge/museum of Marley memorabilia are reminders of the musical legacy.

ROOMS Steeped in musical references, each suite reflects a Marley tune such as *Kaya*, *Nice Time* and of course, the *One Love* honeymoon suite. Each room is decorated with hand-carved mahogany furniture, mosaic tiles and original art and pottery inspired by Carib-African culture. Opulent bedding and towels are from premier textile designer Anichini and daughter Cedella Marley's Catch-a-Fire fashion line. Some rooms open to the resort's terrace, while others have private balconies. Though the interiors give the impression of being laidback and unplugged, the wired crowd will be gratified to find flat-screen TVs, Bose sound systems and high-speed Internet access discreetly tucked away.

FOOD AND DRINK The cuisine at the resort's restaurant, *Simmer Down*, is organic, local Caribbean gourmet. The chef is a Bahamian who trained in Jamaica, and Parisian Philippe Sahnoune is the master of food and beverage.

But the real bosses of the kitchen, according to Sahnoune, are those overseeing the creation of Jamaican favourites such as jerk chicken and pepper pot soup; "It's Miss Lurline and Miss Roberts who keep us authentic," he says.

SERVICE The Marleys have hired people who worked for their family in the past, so the staff is devoted to the resort project. With a two-to-one ratio of staff to guests, the care lavished on visitors is both impeccable and discreet. There is also 24-hour room service and access to personal concierges.

THINGS TO DO Close to home, lounge in the resort's *Natural Mystic Spa*, which uses treatments based on African and Caribbean herbal traditions. Diving and fishing excursions

Hotel vitals

TOP DRAW

Bob Marley fans have the chance to mingle with family members, who are often at the resort. You'll also find chaise lounges on the private crescent of white sand, authentic Jamaican food with an upscale twist, a smoke-free environment and, of course, music, music, music.

NEEDS WORK

The resort is new so there are still a few details to iron out. The Bob Marley souvenir shop in the front of the resort with its tacky trinkets and rolling papers belies the villa's elegance.

are minutes away, as are lazy sailing trips to outlying islands.

And for party people, there is endless music. The resort hosts many live bands and nearby clubs play Bahamian music into the wee hours. For those who want a tryst with lady luck, there are several nearby casinos.

» Special to The Globe and Mail