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BY RAHIM KANANI | NEWS, ONE ON ONE | MARCH 23, 2015

"A collection of tiny jewel-like islands, Exuma is world-renowned for its magnificent coral reefs, colorful sea life and powdery white-sand beaches offering the ultimate Caribbean experience," explained Sandra Grissen-Clothier, General Manager of the Grand Isle Resort and Spa. In an interview, we discussed the grandeur of the resort and idyllic setting, luxurious accommodations, their award-winning spa, and the perfect itinerary for first-time vacationers.

Tell me a little bit about the location and setting of Grand Isle Resort & Spa.

Best described as a combination of wilderness and polish, the Exuma experience begins before you land at Grand Isle Resort & Spa as you fly over the 120-mile-long chain of hundreds of small islands that comprise the Bahamas. The "land" part of the environment is pretty, but it's the "sea" that dazzles. Sitting directly on crescent shaped Emerald Bay with views of the gin clear waters you can step onto our beach that is made up of powdery white sand and into an underwater world of Technicolor fish and coral.



Why Exuma?

Great Exuma and its Cays are the most exotic of the Bahamas Out Islands, and the most authentic. A collection of tiny jewel-like islands, Exuma is world-renowned for its magnificent coral reefs, colorful sea life and powdery white-sand beaches offering the ultimate Caribbean experience. The largest island of the 365 cays comprising the Exumas archipelago, Great Exuma has been named as one of the top 10 places to visit in the Caribbean. It's all about life on the water, a totally laid back Bahamian lifestyle that has been the best kept secret of savvy tropical vacationers. Great Exuma is located within the Out Islands of the Bahamas just above the Tropic of Cancer and is roughly 120 miles southeast of Nassau, Bahamas, 300 miles southeast of Miami, and 700 miles from Atlanta.



In terms of the accommodations, how would you describe the different villas, and what makes the truly luxurious two- and four-bedroom penthouses so special?

The resort offers the utmost in luxury, quality, privacy and space (from 1,250 – 5,200 sq ft) yet nature remains the focal point with views to the ocean, lush gardens or dramatic fairways of the golf course that lies adjacent to the resort. Custom-designed furnishings, terraces or balconies, and a fully-appointed gourmet kitchen was key to the resort being recipient of Trip Advisor's Travelers' Choice® Awards in 2012 as one of the Top 25 Luxury Hotels in the Caribbean. From the architecture, landscaping, and interior design to a host of modern and thoughtful conveniences the award remains well deserved. If there were an award for "Most Glamorous Archipelago" in the Bahamas, Exuma would surely win.



When it comes to on-site amenities, what would you recommend?

The Sea Star Spa at Grand Isle Resort was chosen as one of the Top 25 Relaxation and Spa Hotels in the Caribbean by Trip Advisor's Travelers' Choice Awards 2012. There you can immerse yourself in the capable hands of Elemis trained practitioners and experience our signature hot lava shell massage designed to sooth your stress. Alternatively, you can rejuvenate your mind and body with an invigorating sea salt scrub, a Balinese massage, organic facials, manicures or pedicures. Therapies are all provided in one of three treatment rooms and the outdoor patio is the perfect place to relax before or after treatments with a tropical juice or herbal tea.



What's the philosophy underpinning the menu and cuisine, and what are some of your signature dishes at the property?

The open-air poolside Palapa Grill serves traditional Caribbean jerk-style seafood, Bahamian barbeque and simple American favorites. Light fare and the full-service bar offers a variety of beverages and signature tropical cocktails that are available poolside or on the beautiful beach. Exuma Blue is our signature cocktail and probably the most popular drink. From your villa you can saunter over to Palapa for breakfast, snacks, lunch and dinner. Alternatively, if you are not inclined to don your chef's hat in the gourmet kitchen of your villa, you can choose to arrange for private dining services.



For first-time visitors looking to get away, what would be the perfect itinerary to enjoy all Grand Isle has to offer?

On your day of arrival, you may just wish to absorb the beauty and peace of the resort, take a spin on your golf cart to be able to take it all in. Our pool and beach areas overlook the long stretch of beautiful Emerald Bay, so depending on your preference you can lounge poolside or jump into the water. Enjoy dinner in our Palapa restaurant and watch the sunset. Day 2 – would be to get out on the water in a half day excursion to see the cays, and visit the swimming pigs – which is a major attraction here in Exuma and definitely considered a bucket list attraction. Day 3 could include exploring Georgetown to visit the little shops and have a lunch with a cold beer in one of the popular cafes on the water. Be low-key, kick back like a local and then return to Grand Isle for a dip in Emerald Bay.