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Photo by William Richards

Photos by Cate Stephenson

# simply the best

Luxury Caribbean getaways with a twist

Words by Juliet Austin

In this frenetically-paced world of ours, the modern Caribbean can thankfully still boast that it holds more than just lingering associations with its old 'soon come' mentality where hanging out under the palm trees sipping cocktails was the order of the day. Here, four innovative resorts show how they have reinvented Caribbean luxury for the twenty-first century lifestyle. →

## COTTON TREE in Grand Cayman – Where the Livin' Is Easy



As the gates glide apart on the two-acre Cotton Tree estate, the singular vision and brainchild of island girl, Heather Lockington, it is clear that what lies beyond the threshold is something unparalleled in the world of luxury. A rolling lawn bordered by lush foliage and trees bursting with blooms draws the eye down past four charming pastel-hued cottages, across the shimmering turquoise of the freshwater pool surrounded by cosy seating nooks ensconced in swathes of billowing white linen, through the dappled shadows of a Seagrape copse to the breathtaking vastness of the Caribbean Sea. As she greets me, Heather cradles her first guava; eyes gleaming like a proud parent. "Each guest receives fresh flowers and fruit upon arrival,



it's just part of Caymanian hospitality," she enthuses. Opened in April 2009, Cotton Tree has the look and feel of a place that has come of age, blazing its own unique trail and offering guests an authentic experience grounded in place and time. Situated on 400 feet of beachfront – a protected



sea turtle nesting zone – on the northernmost point of Grand Cayman's West Bay, Cotton Tree offers a unique luxury lodging experience intended to make guests feel every bit at home in their dreamy Caribbean getaway – a concept that is key to the burgeoning success of this thoughtfully-designed boutique cottage hotel.

local artwork and framed archive photography anchors the design in place, giving a real 'home-from-home' feel. With fully stocked gourmet kitchens, guests can choose to cook in the privacy of their cottage or enjoy the services of the resort's personal chef and sommelier. "I wanted the cottages to feel luxurious," states the owner, "but in a simple way."



tranquility and solitude, allowing its special 'surfsong' to soothe and rejuvenate the lost soul, with its boho-chic style and low-key earthy vibe. Here, life is as much about taking in the breathtaking coastal beauty – the uneven shorelines, dramatic granite boulders and balmy subtropical foliage – as it is stargazing, beachcombing, tinkering in tide pools or playing 'fetch' with Healey, the couple's trusty 'coconut retriever'.

Seeking to create an oasis with all the privacy of home, yet the convenience and concierge services of a resort, guests are invited to 'redefine time' – to live on a whim and a prayer

## Play to Your Own Tune at SURFSONG in the British Virgin Islands

Mark and Cate Stephenson chanced upon paradise like all great Caribbean settlers from years of old... by boat. Originally from Canada, the couple navigated the warm waters of the Caribbean under sail for four years before being drawn on the tide to the sailing fantasyland of the British Virgin Islands. Striking gold in Well Bay, a sheltered cove nestled into the south coast of Beef Island, they set their final anchor, establishing Surfsong Villas – an intimate, signature boutique resort offering the ultimate Caribbean escape and the best in barefoot luxury.

Cocooned by nature, the enclave of villas radiates



with candlelit dinners served by request in the tropical Zen pagoda, shady afternoons spent at the beach lounge or magical evenings kayaking through the mangroves under a sky lit with luminous, shimmering stars.



Accommodations range from charming traditional cottages hidden under shady leaf canopies to the relaxed elegance of the Pool House with its private pool and deck for sun worshippers. "Our own travels fuel our passion for Surfsong and the unique services we provide," explains Cate. "Each member of staff shares a true desire to ensure that each guest experiences an ideal vacation."

Measured and constructed around mature trees and boulders, natural building materials in locally-hewn stone and hardwoods complement interiors with finishes, colours and textures designed to reflect nature. "We wanted to achieve the look of a resort as an established extension of nature," says Cate. Inside, casual yet sumptuous Balinese furnishings combine with seagrass, carved wood, bamboo and teak to exude the classic romantic ambience of the Caribbean. Communal areas like the tropical, tree-shaded courtyard or two-storey Balinese beach pavilion provide ample gathering areas while seaside patios and private decks allow for moments of seclusion and retreat.

It would seem that guests loyal to Surfsong's unique brand



of luxury want to sing to the same tune. In response to demand, Surfsong will soon expand its offerings to include a villa ownership model for those wanting their very own piece of the dream. "The intimacy of the existing resort will be complemented by the addition of four new villas – two waterfront and two hillside sites – slated to begin construction in the off-season of 2012," Mark explains. "Along with those four existing villas, there will be a total of eight separately-owned villas on the property, making for a very limited ownership group." Hoping to attract like-minded owners, the couple have joined forces with world-class architects, Roger Downing & Partner Co. Ltd., to create what they call "invisible architecture," where landscape and time blend with the surroundings. Designs include ample shaded outdoor living spaces complete with individual splash pools and a natural palette of stonewalls, cedar-shingle roofs, glass and hardwoods.

While prospective villa owners enjoy the signature comfort and calm of the Surfsong experience, every detail of the construction process will be taken care of from furnishing and finishing to the selection of superior quality linens and towels. "The end result will be a villa that embodies their personal tastes and design considerations, presented to them in a 'turn-key package'. All the benefits of villa ownership, without any of the hassles."



## MALLIOUHANA HOTEL AND SPA, Anguilla – Kids Rule



Imagine... a tiny tropical island in the British West Indies. You gaze out across the unfathomable horizon, senses alive, and body still tingling from the warm Jacuzzi jets. From your private balcony vantage, perched high on a soaring cliff top, your eyes trace the sweeping white sands outlining an endless shoreline. "Fly me to the moon," you hum. "And let me dance among the stars..." And while you play Caribbean Queen, Malliouhana is ensuring that your kids discover life is a beach.

Who said that adults were first in line when they created luxury? Unlike other über-luxe resorts, the brains behind Anguilla's Malliouhana Hotel have not overlooked the needs of their younger guests. While parents soak up the heady blend of warm Caribbean hospitality and luxuriate in the understated European elegance, those with their

sites set on a slightly different version of R&R are invited to enjoy their very own playground paradise.

With fully supervised beach play areas targeted specifically at 2-5 year olds and 5-12 year olds, what self-respecting ankle-biter is going to pass up the opportunity to wallow in the shallow waters of the paddling pool with its soft spray fountains or 'take to the high seas' aboard the resort's 26-foot pirate ship complete with riotous water canon, padded pirate punching bags and 60-foot long water propelled slide?

For those seeking a bigger splash, there is the adjacent 11-foot deep diving pool with double springboards and for those 'too cool for school,' teens can partake in complimentary watersports activities ranging from water-skiing and sailing to snorkelling and windsurfing. Simply stated: it does not get much better than this.

Opened in 1984 by father-son owner-managers Leon and Nigel Roydon, Malliouhana Hotel and Spa sits resplendent on twenty-five sprawling acres of lushly landscaped grounds on Anguilla's northwest coast, where their proudest boast is having four traffic lights and thirty-three beaches. Red tile roofs and rustic terracotta tiling are set off by whitewashed walls, elegant arches and towering columns, while high ceilings, window walls and walkways festooned in languishing bougainvillea reinvent the tropical motif.

Blending Mediterranean design and French Riviera style with classic, understated Caribbean chic played out in dark walnut →

