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Editor's Letter



Eva Leonard
Editor in Chief



Cotton Tree resort, Cayman Islands

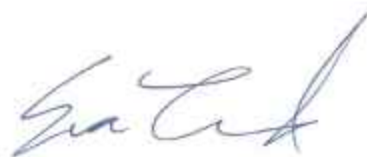
Who wouldn't want to work in a sunny space with stellar views, free Wi-Fi, comfortable armchairs, access to tiers of canapés and fairly free-flowing drink?

Whether you're already a devotee of hotel club or executive floors and, in particular, the lounges that are often part of the deal, or if you've yet to experience them, you'll want to turn to this issue's cover story, "Another Level," starting on page 45.

Gary Bowerman and Sallie Brady look at the genesis of hotel club levels, the business being done in these executive aeries, and the benefits they offer business travelers. *BT* staff, along with our international network of freelancers, also offer an overview of some of the world's best and newest executive lounges.

Also in this issue, Jeff Heilman taps into Montreal's creative energy, Mark Chesnut reports on Mexico City's evolution, as Mexico celebrates the 200th anniversary of its independence from Spain, and the 100th anniversary of the Mexican Revolution. Janet Forman takes in Abu Dhabi's glittering wonders, and Mary Winston Nicklin tracks Amman's growth as a regional business hub.

And, looking for a little relaxation, we tour the diverse wine country of New Zealand, and embrace the tranquility of a cottage resort in the Cayman Islands.



Eva Leonard
Editor in Chief
eva@btusonline.com

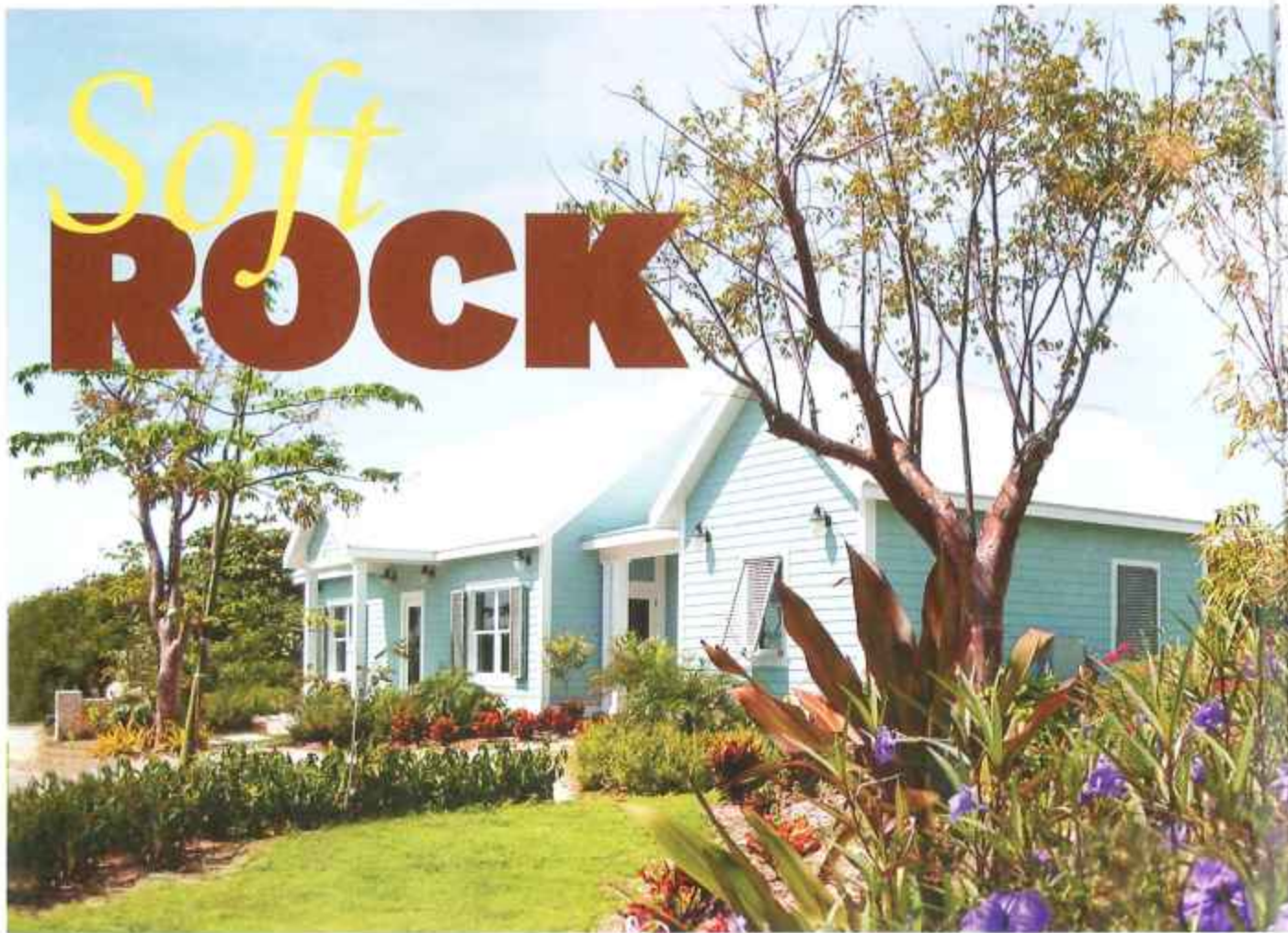


Club InterContinental Hong Kong bar



Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, Abu Dhabi

Soft ROCK



Ally Miola
explores the
Cayman Islands
from a colorful
cottage base

It's hard to determine what makes a true Caymanian. Before Europeans made their way to the Caribbean, the island was barely habitable for indigenous tribes who could survive, but hardly flourish due to the unforgiving terrain. You wouldn't know it while driving across the island today, but the geography is dominated by black hell rock, making cultivation near impossible. You can visit the town of Hell for a good look at the barren formations and for a unique postmark on your letters back home.

Because of this, there really isn't any such thing as a native, at least not in the sense most people think. Which is what makes Cotton Tree resort owner Heather Lockington, a first generation Caymanian, so qualified to create the "true and authentic" island experience. While Lockington was talking with some tourists on the beach one day, they asked her where they could find accommodations aside from the cookie-cutter hotel chains. They wanted a more genuine experience, and Lockington was surprised to realize that it didn't exist. It was this chance encounter that planted the seed from which Cotton Tree would grow.

I'd been looking forward to visiting Grand Cayman's first boutique cottage resort for

months, but realized that I had no idea where Cotton Tree actually was when a customs agent asked. Admitting with a laugh that I didn't know where I was going, the agent asked her colleague if she'd heard of the resort, but she only shook her head in reply.

I don't expect this reaction to be common for very long. Cotton Tree may be one of the newest and smaller properties on Grand Cayman (it consists of just four two-bedroom cottages), but I expect it will soon make a big reputation for itself as word spreads. Each of the four cottages is homey, yet spacious at 1,600 square feet, with local artwork, high ceilings and fully-stocked kitchens; and the service is so on-point that you never want for anything once you land. (The resort even takes care of airport transfers.)

After dropping off my bags and enjoying a glass of fresh-squeezed lemonade, I unwound from my flight in one of the cabanas surrounding the nearby pool. The beach lay just beyond, and I dipped my toes in the pristine water before cleaning up for dinner.

That evening, I met with the other hotel guests for Cotton-tinis, refreshing signature drinks with vodka, guava, red grapefruit and mint. Sommelier Harvey Setterfield hosted our casual cocktail hour with an arsenal of



Cotton Tree guest room, pool (below) and Seagrape Cottage (left)

to have something so large swimming so close. But with kind instructions from our guides, I learned how to hold them, however briefly, and send them back on their way. It felt like handling an oversized portobello mushroom with a vacuum nozzle, as it lightly suctioned my skin to see if I was edible—thankfully, I wasn't, but the experience was a defining moment on the trip. The unusually chilly weather kept me from snorkeling afterward, but I was more than content to sip a drink while taking in the views from the boat. I'd already had my Kodak moment.

Once back at the resort, I warmed up in the poolside hot tub and then opened up

DETAILS COTTON TREE

375 Conch Point Road, West Bay,
Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands
Tel. 345-943-0700
www.caymancottontree.com

A minimum of a three-night stay is required.

fun facts about Champagne and the various wines he personally selected for each cottage. Affable as he is knowledgeable, his wine tastings and pairings are crafted to reflect each client's needs. It's this personalized service that has made him one of the island's top sommeliers, working not only with Cotton Tree, but also a number of other high-end properties, including The Ritz-Carlton. For repeat guests, he'll also take note of their favorite wines and be sure to have them available upon their return. Just try to phone in any special requests at least 10 days in advance. This is an island, after all, and some deliveries can require careful coordination.

Afterward, we sat down to dinner beneath glowing lanterns swinging in the mangrove trees. We started with a savory carrot ginger soup, followed by fresh-caught lobster with mushroom and vegetable gratin, and ended with a decadent sticky toffee pudding. Our group had a number of dietary restrictions, from vegetarian to gluten-free, and the kitchen easily accommodated us without sacrificing flavor on any plates.

Even though I was still a little full when I woke up the next morning, I realized that one of my friends had opened the door for our breakfast delivery. Fist-sized bananas, spiced



muffins, assorted breads and a bowl of cut fruit had been delivered on a wicker tray. The cabinets were already stocked with coffee, tea and a choice of exotic spreads like mango-honey. Sitting at the table in my soft bathrobe, I could have been content to stay put all day, nibbling away and working on the free Wi-Fi, but I had a date with a boat ahead of me.

My group boarded a catamaran bound for Stingray City, a nearby sandbar where we could swim with wild, albeit somewhat "domesticated," stingrays. In years past, local fishermen cut up their daily catch at this site, throwing the remains overboard, and the voracious stingrays caught on fast, returning often for the free meals. Today, the fishermen have relocated, and various tours now take their place, with buckets of food that keep the stingrays anything but shy.

Some of these gentle giants were as wide as my arm span, and it was a little disconcerting

a bottle of wine (prices start at \$30) from my cottage for a pre-dinner drink. Bike rentals are complimentary at Cotton Tree, and while I never had the chance to ride one to the famous Seven Mile Beach (just 10 minutes away by car), I did take a joyride around the immediate area, passing Ristorante Pappagallo along the way. We had dinner at this Italian restaurant on our final evening, enjoying local seafood beneath a traditional thatched roof. Don't miss out on the risotto, bursting with shrimp, scallops, calamari and mussels.

As we walked back to Cotton Tree that night, talk turned to having a Wii tournament (each cottage is equipped with the gaming system), but I just wanted to return to Almond Cottage, slip between the Egyptian cotton sheets and drift off to sleep. As I nodded off that night, tired from such a full weekend, I realized that my little tribe had found a way to thrive on this island, after all. ■