

Honduras: Infinity Bay Spa and Beach Resort Sets A New Standard of Luxury

Roatan, a diver's paradise off the coast of Honduras, welcomes the "swankiest" new hotel on the island with its upscale beachfront and ocean view villas.

GAIL P. DUBOV

Green and hilly, dotted with small towns and friendly locals, Roatan has been a well-kept secret of dive enthusiasts who are drawn to the island's turquoise waters and the world's second largest barrier reef. Thirty miles off the coast of Honduras, it has a laid back Caribbean beach vibe with open-air restaurants, two-dollar beers and small, no-frills dive accommodations. But thanks to a group of visionary developers from Oregon, a new beachfront resort offers a first class alternative. Along the island's prettiest stretch of white powder sand, Infinity Bay Spa and Beach Resort opened its doors just in time to usher in the new year.



GENE ALBERT

With The Wall Street Journal naming it the "swankiest" accommodation option in Roatan, there is certainly plenty to celebrate.

Well Appointed Units, All with Ocean Views

Located on West Bay beach, Infinity Bay Spa and Beach Resort currently has 55 units of one, two, and three-bedroom fully furnished villas. Built along a graceful lagoon-style infinity pool, each villa is spacious, with ocean views. "Our one bedroom units are 850 sq. ft.," Mike Wendling, Infinity Bay property manager told TravelWorld News, "much



MIKE WENDLING

larger than average hotel rooms." With most hotel rooms measuring 400-600 sq. ft, Infinity Bay's one-bedroom villas are almost twice the size, comfortably accommodating four people with a pull-out sofa bed. The two-bedroom villa is 1400 sq. ft., sleeping six, the three-bedroom, a huge 2500 sq. ft, is perfect for a family of eight--with plenty of room to spare. Each unit has one or two verandas, with an outdoor patio table. Units are airy and open, tastefully furnished with elaborately carved hardwood bedroom sets, quality sheets and towels, a satellite tv, a/c, ceiling fans, state-of-the-art granite-topped fully equipped kitchens (that would rival any client's

home kitchen), tile floors, broadband internet service and phones. "We have the ultimate in luxury villas on the most beautiful beach in the Caribbean at very competitive rates," Wendling added. "Our fully furnished one bedrooms, with full kitchen and amenities, start at just \$175 a night, which is an incredible price compared to any other vacation rental on the island, or the Caribbean for that matter." Promotional rates start at \$240/night for two-bedroom units and \$340/night for three-bedroom units.

At the edge of the infinity pool, a swim up "palapa" bar has just been completed a few feet from the beach. The heart of the resort, it's the place to hang, where cold beers, Monkey La Las (an island specialty) mix well with simple, well prepared island food. Offering good coffee and a hearty breakfast, it's also a favorite morning spot before a plunge into the nearby water.

The piece d' resistance is the reef, fifty feet off shore. Your client can swim right out to this colorful underwater garden that hugs the shoreline. It's a diver's paradise, along with world class sailing, fishing, canoeing, kayaking and wind surfing. Dive boats and water taxis stop at Infinity Bay's private dock to take guests to dive sites or nearby locations like the Roatan Institute of Marine Sciences to swim with dolphins. For active families, there's also rainforest canopy adventures, horseback riding, an iguana farm, and a ride on a glass bottom boat. Infinity Bay can book any tours on the island or mainland Honduras.

The Back Story

It all started just three years ago in Eugene, Oregon. Gene Albert, active in commercial real estate for thirty years, took his brother and father on vacation to Roatan. A hometown couple had left Eugene to work on the island and curiosity sent him to "check things out." The rest is history. Albert bought five lots on the beach, what he calls his "starter project", building vacation homes on the edge of Half Moon Bay in West End. With his brother Vernon and Eugene-based business partners, Albert soon bought seven more acres from Julio Galindo, island native, former mayor, and owner of Anthony's Key Resort, a popular dive resort that has been on the island for 30 years. That was the day after Thanksgiving, 2004. Ground breaking for Infinity Bay came in May 2006. Phase One had begun.

President of Infinity Bay, Albert is soft spoken, focused, with a positive attitude that spreads to everyone on the Infinity Bay team. If there's a motto for the resort, it's "There are no problems, only solutions," an upbeat attitude that seems to echo



A luxury villa at Infinity Bay has a state-of-the-art kitchen that opens to a dining area, living room and outdoor veranda.

through the complex and inspire both staff and guests. In architecture as well as attitude, Albert had a clear vision. "From time spent in Guatemala volunteering on medical missions, I fell in love with the architecture of Antigua, with its Spanish Mediterranean overtones," he explained. Honduran architects designed the complex of 55 villas with large, overhanging verandas and red terracotta roofs on stucco buildings that seem to glow in the late afternoon light. These units complete "Phase One" of a two-phase project (hence their "soft opening" this past December). Committed to quality construction, the resort is a role model for "green design" with an ecologically constructed septic system, reverse osmosis water purification system and solar hot water heaters. "We're from Oregon," added Gene Albert with a laugh, "so we naturally think this way."

There are other pioneering "firsts." The resort is the first on the island to be installing elevators in each building and to have 100% potable water—not just out of the tap, but used in ice machines as well. It's also the only resort with specially coated glass windows to withstand hurricane force winds.

Resort Manager Who Knows the Region

Mike Wendling, Infinity Bay Resort Manager, had been knocking around Central America for years. He helped start the Maruba Resort in Belize and when asked by Francis Ford Coppola to help build Blancaneux, he did. He soon found himself in Honduras managing properties first on the mainland, then on Roatan, arriving at Infinity Bay a year and a half ago. "Setting up a resort has changed so much," Mike explained, "now we order on the Internet and it comes off a ship

to port." Well acquainted with the other tourist destinations in the region, Mike sees the connection they have with

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

SUNBREEZE HOTEL & SUNBREEZE SUITES

AMBERGRIS CAYE, BELIZE



The perfect combination offering facilities to suit the needs of most travelers seeking a somewhere off the beaten path. A five minute stroll apart, located in the town of San Pedro, yet out of the hustle and bustle. The SunBreeze Hotel features 43 rooms offering the facilities and services of a resort while the SunBreeze Suites has 20 oceanfront fully equipped suites. A variety of packages are available.

SUNBREEZE HOTEL
 email:sunbreeze@btl.net
 www.sunbreeze.net
 toll free: 1-800-688-0191

SUNBREEZE SUITES
 email:sunbreesesuites@btl.net
 www.sunbreesesuites.com
 toll free: 1-800-826-1631

INFINITY BAY SPA AND BEACH RESORT FROM PAGE 3

Roatan. "Belize and Costa Rica," he explained, "are stepping stones to Roatan."

Both countries have set up excellent jungle/beach programs, a future plan for Infinity Bay as well. Wendling is in negotiations with TACA and Continental Airlines to develop air/land packages. "Airlines are now seeing the publicity we're getting," explained Wendling, referring to The Wall Street Journal article and a recent feature in The New York Times including Roatan among the "50 Places to Visit in 2008." It's great publicity that has not gone unnoticed, as he points out. "My e-mail requests went from ten a day to fifty after The Wall Street Journal article came out." Requests turned into paying guests when the resort boasted 65% occupancy in its soft opening at the end of the year.

A Sleepy Island About to Wake Up

Both Royal Caribbean and Carnival Cruise Lines have big plans on the

drawing board for Roatan. Royal Caribbean is planning a US\$25 million cruise dock in Coxen Hole, while Carnival is spending US\$45 million on a new pier farther east, projected to unload up to 7,000 passengers daily by the end of 2009.

As Gene Albert pointed out, "cruise ships expose people to the island and then they return on flights." More airlines are starting nonstop weekend service directly into Roatan and as of mid-February, Continental has nonstop midweek service from Houston. A golf course—the first on the island—is being discussed.

All signs point to the coming of age of this small, English-speaking Caribbean island.

Phase Two About to Begin

Phase Two, the ambitious second half of this project that completes Infinity Bay Spa and Beach Resort, is about to begin. Projected completion is April '09 for an additional 90 furnished units, a four story building facing the ocean at the far end of the infinity pool, with a state-of-the-art spa/health club, a multi-level 150-seat restaurant, a lobby/reception area and a conference center. Construction has been blocked off from the resort and most will be staged away from the main property so there's little interference with guests.

Getting There

Infinity Bay is twenty minutes from the airport and all airport transfers are included in the villa price. Continental starts Thursday departures from Houston nonstop to Roatan on Feb 14th and flies nonstop from Houston and Newark on Saturdays.

TACA flies nonstop from Houston on Saturdays as well with weekly nonstops from Miami. Delta flies nonstop from Atlanta.

Flights on AA and other airlines connect through San Pedro Sula, Tegucigalpa and San Salvador. A one hour high speed ferry from La Ceiba on the mainland leaves twice daily.

Industry welcome

Eager to welcome the industry to this premier property, Infinity Bay will comp rooms for any agent/operator interested in a site inspection. E-mail Mike at mwendling@infinitybay.com if interested. The resort gives a 10% commission for any agent bookings. Fam trips are planned for the near future.

Infinity Bay Spa and Beach Resort, 866-369-1977, In Oregon: 541-359-1229, www.infinitybay.com

TABACÓN GRAND SPA NAMED FAVORITE SPA IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Tabacón Grand Spa Thermal Resort, a relative newcomer on Costa Rica's spa scene, has been selected the "Favorite Spa in Central America" and one of the world's "Top 10 Best Mineral Spring Water Spas" by the well-traveled spa-goers who recently weighed in on the 2007 Luxury SpaFinder Readers' Choice Awards.

Resort Managing Director Uwe Wagner and Spa Director Rosa Paulina Perez, will accept the award at The Spa Experience 2007, a global spa showcase in New York City on November 1.

The rainforest-sited resort completed an extensive renovation and enhancement program this past year which included the addition of The Grand Spa.

Wagner noted, "Following several months of thoughtfully considered enhancements aimed at elevating our guests' spa and resort experience, we have achieved our goal to operate what many feel is the finest spa facility in Central America."

Other recent awards and accolades, included being selected as a "Recommended Property" in the prestigious *Condé Nast* Johansens Recommended Hotels, Inns, Resort & Spas collection (one of only four recommended resorts in Costa Rica and the only recommended luxury spa in Central America), and as a "Leading Spa of the World" by Leading Hotels of the World.

Tabacón Grand Spa Thermal Resort, 877-277-8291, www.tabacon.com, www.lhw.com

Parque Marítimo el Coco
HOTEL-RESTAURANTE PLAYA DEL SOL
NICARAGUA

Beach Resort San Juan del Sur Nicaragua

Up to 20% comission
on accommodations

www.playaelcoco.com.ni
parquemaritimo@playaelcoco.com.ni

Exclusive beach resort ideal for couples
and families with children.

Apartments * Bungalow * Houses *
Convention Center * Turtle Arrive.

Playa el Coco, a 17km al sur de San Juan del Sur
Departamento de Rivas, Nicaragua.

Telf1: 00505 89 201 24 Telf2: 1 786 623 0608
Fax: 1 801 812 8456