

There's Nothing Small About Baha Mar

By Dave Weretka with Neal Kotlarek

In Spanish, “baha mar” means “shallow sea.” As one’s plane descends into Nassau International, it is easy to understand why Christopher Columbus referenced the teal and aqua waters of the Bahamas when he first made landfall here back in 1492. Indeed, the lapping waves and pearly white sands across this archipelago of over 700 islands overwhelm the senses and make one wonder why Columbus would ever consider leaving this paradise to discover other parts of the New World.

The phrase took on an added meaning in May, when the 1,000-acre Baha Mar resort opened to rave reviews by both the public and the press. This \$4.2 billion development took over 10 years to build and is anchored by three opulent hotels which, when completed, will incorporate over three dozen restaurants, 20 swimming pools, multiple spas, and a convention center, along with a wide array of sports options. Located a mere 10 minutes from the Nassau airport, the complex appears poised to compete with Atlantis Paradise Island for the title of the most elegant resort destination in the Atlantic Ocean.

Baha Mar is slated to consist of three luxury hotel brands – SLS Hotels, Rosewood Hotels & Resorts and the Grand Hyatt.

The 300-room SLS Lux will open in late fall and will feature ocean-facing guest rooms and 107 residences. With five-star properties in Beverly

Hills, Miami, Miami Beach, and Las Vegas, SLS Hotels are acclaimed for their eclectic style, vibrant nightlife and exquisite dining experiences.

Scheduled to open in 2018, Rosewood will feature 185 ocean view rooms and suites, as well as five beachfront villas. The hotel will include four signature dining venues, a spa, deluxe cabanas and private beach access for guests.

Located on Cable Beach, Grand Hyatt is the largest of



the three hotels and was the first one to open. Amenities include 1,800 hotel rooms – many with remarkable views of the ocean and the surrounding property – six swimming pools (including the Blue Hole pool that offers a cool rock jump into the water), three styles of tennis courts (including clay and grass), nine bars and lounges, five restaurants, a nature preserve, a 30,000 square-foot destination spa, a fitness center and a casino (including racing and sports book) all help make for a fantasy getaway.

Golfers are not forgotten, of course. The Jack Nicklaus Signature 18-hole 7,189-yard Royal Blue course was uniquely designed to provide two dramatically different experiences. The front nine winds over gentle terrain featuring coastal views, undulating sand dunes and brackish ponds. In stark contrast, the back nine was built over what the staff calls a “limestone moonscape” that rises and falls dramatically.

A unique feature of the course is freeform teeing areas that allow the superintendent the option to transition holes dramatically – by as much as 100 yards! – from day to day to ensure that the layout provides a unique experience each time it is played. These adjustments

allow water features, bunkers and trees to be brought into play even if they weren’t remotely considered on a previous round. By offsetting one forward adjustment with another set of tees moved backwards, the overall length of the course is the only constant of a round. Brilliant!

Head golf professional Andy Deiro calls the course set-up plan a unique method of challenging players who look to play Royal Blue multiple times.

“We know that golfers typically play more than one day while on vacation,” Deiro said. “To vary their experiences, each morning a member of the golf professional team thoughtfully places tee locations on the course to take weather, playing conditions and, most importantly, any repeat guests into consideration. These varying tees create a unique and optimal golfing experience.”

The signature hole of the course is No. 16, presenting a dense jungle and an island green. While you might not grab a par on this par 3, make sure to capture a photograph so as to document perhaps the most memorable hole in the Bahamas.

While most golfers don’t travel without their golf clubs, Royal Blue offers an amazing “Better Than Your Own” rental

program that prods one to consider a round with a demo set consisting of exclusive options like Itoboris and PXGs.

“At Royal Blue,” Deiro said, “we don’t expect you to bring your golf clubs to the Bahamas. Instead, we bring top-of-the-line clubs to them. Guests are treated to a unique rental club experience featuring the latest equipment from Callaway, Taylor Made, Titleist and other recognized brands.



Before our guests tee off, a member of our professional team offers a club fitting on our warm-up range to assist in identifying the perfect equipment match.”

One other unique amenity on the golf course (and across the Bahamas) are forecaddie services. The club has partnered with CaddieMaster, which also provides caddie services to some of the top destinations in the world, including Pebble Beach, Pinehurst



and Whistling Straits. “This service,’ Deiro said, “is a true enhancement of a guest’s golf experience on our golf course.”

Make sure to schedule a visit to ESPA spa following your round or after a day of water sports. Signature services inspired by island life include the “Seashore Serenity,” a treatment guaranteed to bring relaxation and contentment even to those who bogeyed the aforementioned 16th hole.

All non-motorized watersports are included in your stay, and well worth the time out on the water. If you choose to take an off-shore excursion, that is available for some snorkeling adventures. Make sure your captain points out Gilligan’s Island on your way out to the reef north of Rose Island. Talk about reminiscing!

Many guests found Churchill’s Rum and Cigar Lounge a favorite place to unwind in the evening. Hard to beat, especially with some live music and a cool Caribbean breeze to top it off.

Royal Blue Golf Club combines with the shallow turquoise seas of the island to create an incredible experience at Baha Mar. Be the first among your friends and family to visit this island paradise. For reservations and more information, visit www.bahamar.com.