

EXPLORING TRAVEL FAVORITES AND FRONTIERS

TRAVEL AGE WEST

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paradise

awaits your arrival



VILLA DEL PALMAR FLAMINGOS BEACH RESORT & SPA

Nuevo Vallarta, Mexico



Celebrates Grand Opening December 2005

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

Island Villas

Tobago's Palms Villas offer the comforts of home

BY JANICE MUCALOV



Guests have private swimming pools for ultimate relaxation.

After spending the day out touring, my girlfriend and I were glad to return to our villa to relax. We slipped on swimsuits, grabbed a cold Carib beer and a plate of sliced fruit from the kitchen fridge, and eased into lounge chairs by our own private swimming pool. I heard sheep bleating in the distance, a symphony of bird songs and the breeze rustling through the trees. It wasn't long before I dozed of.

The quiet, laid-back Caribbean island of Tobago offers several villa-style accommodations. Our home away from home is one of five deluxe villas that make up the Palms Villa Resort. The villas are ideal for families and couples traveling together, for special occasions like weddings and honeymoons — and for those like us who enjoy the comforts of home when on vacation.

Set on a peaceful 10-acre estate atop a hill, each two-storey Palms villa is surrounded by landscaped gardens and has three bedrooms with ensuite bathrooms. The main floor master bedroom is furnished with a king-size bed, while the two upstairs bedrooms have two queen-size beds each. Six adults can comfortably spread out, and foamies are available for extra children.

After awhile, I roused myself from by the pool and stretched my legs. I wandered over to the small koi pond on the property by the pretty white gazebo

used for weddings and chatted with the gardener before checking out a nesting pair of native birds that have claimed one corner of the property by the playground. As I approached the children's swings, the birds suddenly flew out and swooped toward me in a noisy effort to protect their young. I got the hint, and padded back inside our villa to change for dinner.

I loved my room, with its soaring vaulted ceiling, rich sateen striped draperies hanging from black decorator rods, thick, soundproof doors and a massive wooden armoire. In the evenings, I sometimes threw open the huge French doors leading out to the upstairs wraparound veranda and listened to the cicadas and frogs, but most times I liked the cool of the air conditioning instead.

The bathroom is different and fun. All three ensembles have very large, tiled, rain shower areas that can be used as a shallow bathtub.

Refreshed by my afternoon nap by the pool, I was looking forward to eating out. However, when we first arrived, tired as we were from a full day of flying, it was such a relief when Karen, our housekeeper, showed us the light dinner typical of what the resort cooks up for all guests on arrival.

"We've made rice pilaf and fish stew, which you can heat up in the microwave," she had cheerfully offered.

Each villa has a housekeeper, and in addition to



Palms Villas sleep up to six adults comfortably.

daily cleaning, the housekeeper will cook guests' meals too (\$10 per villa for breakfast; \$15 to cook lunch). One morning, we came down to a pre-arranged breakfast of scrambled eggs, bacon, toast and fresh cut pineapple. Guests pay for the groceries — they just need to tell the resort before they arrive what they want and the kitchen will be stocked for them.

While waiting for our taxi to take us to dinner, I moved out to the covered veranda extending from the main floor and sunk into the overstuffed cushion of a cane armchair. Even though there's a spacious living room with TV and DVD player (movies can be signed out from the office), the outside veranda is the main hub for many villa guests. This is where we ate — at the wrought-iron table and chairs off the kitchen.

There's also a huge barbecue on the veranda.

"Guests love to barbecue here," manager David Byrne told us one afternoon when he dropped by to chat.

When our taxi dropped us off back at the resort after dinner, a security guard waved us inside the gated property. Crime is negligible on the island, but the security is still reassuring.

Drifting off to sleep that night, I remind myself not to get too accustomed to this villa life. It may feel like home, but unfortunately it's not. ■

THE PALMS VILLA RESORT

The resort's concierge can help guests with reserving restaurants, booking scuba diving, sailing excursions and other activities and arranging airport transfers.

Rates: \$399 per villa per night for up to four people until Dec. 16 (\$450 for six guests); \$450 for up to four guests; and \$495 for six guests from January through March. Ask for the Batimanzelle villa, which has a peek-a-boo ocean view from upstairs.

Commission: 10 percent

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www.thepalmstobago.com ■