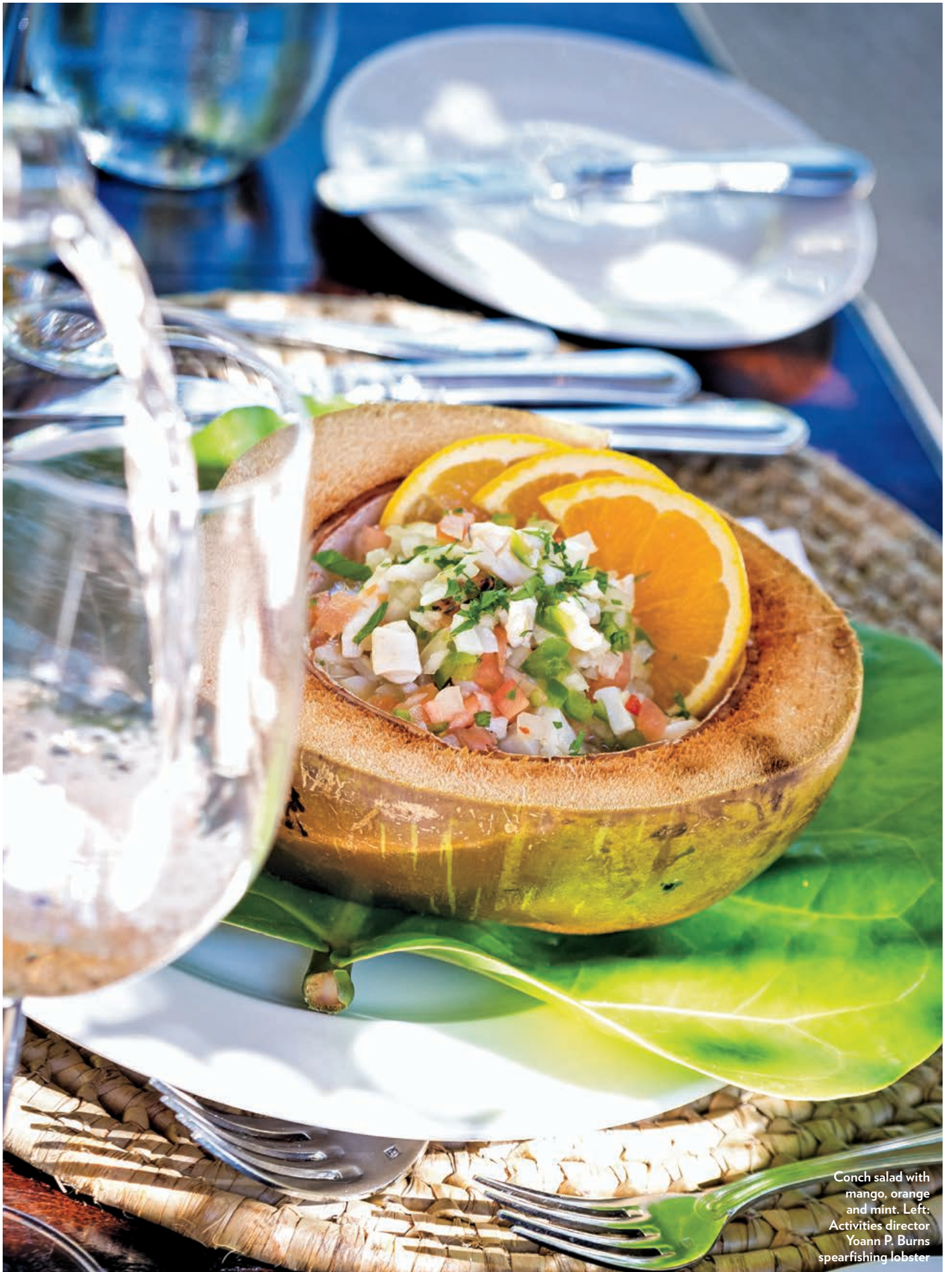




Catch it if you can

A LUXE BAHAMIAN RESORT IS BUILDING ON THE OCEAN-TO-TABLE CONCEPT BY ENCOURAGING GUESTS TO CAPTURE THEIR OWN SEAFOOD

WORDS LARRY OLMSTED
PHOTOGRAPHY GARY JAMES



Conch salad with
mango, orange
and mint. Left:
Activities director
Yoann P. Burns
spearfishing lobster

The overwater spa at
Kamalame Cay. Opposite:
Activities staff member
Marlane Johnson, resort
director Michael King-Hew and
guest Christie Winner
with Rafael; behind: guest
Sarah D. Ranellucci and Burns



Tell the chef to make you cracked conch—that’s the *other* great way to have it,” says Solomon, our fishing guide. We have just plucked three large conchs from the clear, shallow Bahamian waters, and he is demonstrating how to transform one into the region’s signature dish, conch salad. With deft movements and a long, thin boning knife, he cuts the meat from the shell, then trims off the connective tissue. Switching to a large chef’s knife, he slices the conch meat into sashimi-like ribbons, then crosscuts these into smaller pieces. We had brought a basket of ingredients onto the boat with us, and he quickly dices red and green pepper, tomato and onion, combining this with the conch meat in a large zip-lock bag. Next come salt and fresh-squeezed lime and orange juices, followed by a thorough shake. Less than 15 minutes after picking the conch off the seafloor, my wife and I dive into the delicious salad, a take on ceviche, ultra-fresh, suffused with flavor, and “cooked” only by the citric acid in the fruit juices.

This would be a delicious lunch anywhere, but eating it while sitting on a cooler full of local Sands beer on a deserted island doesn’t hurt. Learning about conch, catching it, and the hands-on salad-making experience is just one of several “catch and cook” options offered at Kamalame Cay, a luxury resort on a private island off Andros, one of the best bone-fishing destinations on earth. We spent the morning learning to fly-cast for elusive bonefish while wading through shin-deep tropical waters and mangrove forests with Solomon, and while this is a catch-and-release sport,

many other local creatures make it back to the resort kitchen for lunch or dinner. We use one mature conch for our lunch (experts stress that catching adult conch only will help the species avoid becoming endangered); the other two will be carried back to the chef for the cracked conch—cutlets that are dredged in flour and fried, the Bahamian seafood equivalent of schnitzel. This will be a great starter at dinner, but we still need a main course, so on the way back in, Solomon stops the boat over a rocky undersea formation as I don snorkel, mask and flippers, drop over the side and grab two large lobsters.

Seafood is one of the oldest major sources of protein in the human diet, and permanent settlements living off fish predate those subsisting on any form of livestock by thousands—if not tens of thousands—of years. Fishing is a frequent subject in the Bible, and well depicted in ancient Greek and Roman art, but it dates back much further, at least to the Paleolithic age, as evidenced by dietary references of prehistoric humans. Today, with interest in the origins and authenticity of our food at an all-time high, >





THIS IS THE WORLD'S
MOST BEAUTIFUL SEAFOOD
MARKET, ALL EXPERIENCED
IN MINUTES.

Local fisherman
Hugo with conch,
lobster, grouper
and snapper



“YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND THE WHOLE FISH.”

and trendy fascination with foraging and farm-to-table cuisine, there is no more varied or delicious way to bypass the supermarket and round up your own sustenance than by catching it.

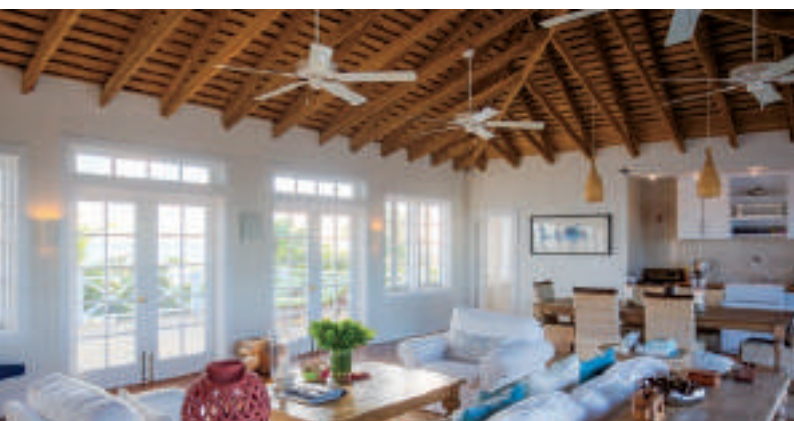
“The magical thing about fresh fish is that it’s one of the only sources of animal protein you can get that hasn’t been messed with or re-engineered. It’s one of the rare times you can eat something just like humans did a millennium ago,” says Michael King-Hew, who along with his husband, David, runs the family-owned resort. Besides stellar fishing, Kamalame has its own farm growing a range of fruits and vegetables, from mangoes to heirloom tomatoes, the only overwater spa in the Bahamas, and world-class scuba diving (the famed Tongue of the

Ocean, a renowned site where Sean Connery trained for the James Bond film *Never Say Never Again*, is just offshore).

“Part of catching your own dinner is to understand the whole fish, from sea to table. We encourage people to participate in this process,” King-Hew says. “A lot of our guests have never fished before, and the guides show them how to clean it right on the dock, then cut it into fillets—or loins if it’s tuna—so they can see exactly what a whole fish yields. We use every part: The heads become fish stock, and if it’s tuna, we instantly make some tartare and they eat it right there with wasabi and soy—just delicious. Then that evening, a chef teaches them how to cook it, or if there is a group, David and I might do it ourselves, showing them all the options.”

Serve a guest a fish and you feed them for a meal, but teach a guest to prepare whole fish and you’ve improved their home cooking for a lifetime. This is why similar “cook your catch” or “fish with a chef” programs are suddenly popping up at resorts around the world, focused on everything from octopus to bass.

Kamalame is especially multidimensional with its offerings, from conch and hand-caught spiny lobster to both reef and deep-sea fishing for red and gray snapper, tuna, grouper, mahi-mahi and many others. The day after our conch and lobster expedition, we head out on the high seas and catch raspberry grouper and yellowfin. >





Burns on the dock.
Opposite, clockwise
from top left: Lionfish
and Bahamian grits;
Ranellucci with a live
starfish that was then
released; two-bedroom
oceanside villa

FOUR GREAT “LINE-TO-TABLE” DESTINATIONS

Kamalame Cay is on the forefront of the ocean-to-kitchen trend, but it's hardly alone. Here are some other superior spots.

01

Four Seasons Oahu at Ko Olina, Kapolei, HI
Hawaii's newest Four Seasons resort offers fishing with a chef as part of its Taste of Oahu experience.
fourseasons.com

02

Clayoquot Wilderness Resort, British Columbia, Canada
This award-winning Relais & Châteaux outpost offers offshore fly-fishing, with classes on cleaning and filleting cod and halibut.
wildretreat.com

03

Copal Tree Lodge, Toledo, Belize
Guests enjoy a snorkeling excursion where the crew dives for conch, lobster and crab, then learn to prepare their own fresh catch for a festive seafood BBQ.
copaltreelodge.com

04

Hacienda Beach Club & Residences, Cabo San Lucas, Mexico
At the 22-acre resort, executive chef Raúl Lucido teaches the “Wahoo Workshop,” an eat-your-catch program focused on this delicacy.
haciendacaboresort.com



King-Hew on Lovers Rock with Rafael, a Portuguese water dog

As you ride out to sea, the color of the ocean can teach you about the diversity of habitat, and the diversity of life. The khaki bonefish flats are home to crabs, shrimp and lobster. The bright emerald coral reefs accommodate various snapper, grouper and more lobster and conch. Beyond the reef, less than 10 minutes by boat, is the open Atlantic, plunging to 6,000 feet, dark, imposing and the domain of mahi-mahi and big tuna. This is the world's most beautiful seafood market, and all of it can be experienced in minutes.

In recent years, the seafood industry has gained notoriety for fraud and bait-and-switch schemes where consumers buy or order an expensive fish and are served a cheaper, less desirable and sometimes dangerous counterfeit. Red snapper, commonly caught at Kamalame, is the most faked fish in the United States, while the wild Alaska salmon you bought might actually be farmed and imported.

The situation grew so problematic that President Barack Obama appointed a task force just to combat seafood fraud, but almost all these issues can be circumvented simply by buying whole fish—something few Americans do because many of us do not know what to

do with it. While catching and eating your own dinner at a posh resort is fun, it can also have lasting benefits. At Kamalame, you don't even have to do the catching if you prefer to just eat or cook, as the resort has decades-long relationships with three local fishermen who come by the dock daily, and there are always multiple fresh seafood options at breakfast, lunch and dinner.

“It works on so many levels,” says King. “It's fun to eat what you caught and know it was swimming just hours before, and when you catch a big fish, more than you can eat, we'll put it on the menu as a special with your name, like ‘Larry's Tuna Sashimi,’ and at dinner all the guests will clap when you come in. People always think it tastes better when they know the person who caught it.” **CL**