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LUXURY TRAVEL, RESORTS & DEVELOPMENTS

AUG
+
SEPT
2022

60

Master O2's luxuriously appointed guest rooms have private balconies and overlook the ocean.

DESTINATION: BARBADOS

BALMY BARBADOS

O2 BEACH CLUB & SPA
OFFERS THE PERFECT
CARIBBEAN ESCAPE.

BY NATALIE GALE

The warmth hits my face first when I open the door onto the balcony in the morning. From several stories above, I hear the waves crash onto the white sand beach as the wind blows sea air into my room. On the other side of the hotel, the colorful homes of Saint

Lawrence Gap, just outside Bridgetown, Barbados, stretch over the hills and into town. Not a bad view to wake up to.

I'm at O2 Beach Club & Spa, a new luxury all-inclusive resort on Barbados' south coast. The five star hotel hits all the important points—pools, private beach, delicious on-site dining, and a spa. But O2 makes luxury comfortable and down-to-earth, with poolside dining, friendly service, and artwork by Bajan creatives hung on the walls.

Fifteen minutes east of Bridgetown, O2's location on the south coast means there's something for everyone—snorkeling, windsurfing, lively restaurants and nightlife, and relaxing, swimmable beaches. We even ventured to a nearby distillery for a rum tasting one day. Staying on the south side is a bit of a choose-your-own adventure.

O2 focuses on cultivating a sense of

place—while travelers might head to a Caribbean island like Turks & Caicos for seclusion, Barbados is great for explorers who like learning about a destination's culture. The resort's newly opened gift shop features exclusively Barbados-made items.

O2's 130 guest rooms, suites, and residences come in three tiers: Club Collection, Luxury Collection, and Concierge Collection. All rooms include private balconies, crisp white linens, and beautifully updated bathrooms with rainfall showers. And with a five-night stay, all guests get a complimentary round of golf at the 18-hole Barbados Golf Club.

The adults-only Luxury Collection suites are situated in a newly constructed nine-story tower, which also houses the property's new chic, state-of-the-art spa with panoramic views. The Luxury Collection's first-floor swim-up suites offer



direct access to the river pool surrounding the building, with the beach just beyond.

The Concierge Collection suites bump up the opulence even more with designer kitchens, oceanfront balconies, and butler service. Both the Luxury and Concierge Collections include amenities like a bottle of champagne on arrival, nightly turndown service, spa credit, and unlimited access to Sea Breeze Beach House, Oz's nearby sister property, a smaller, quainter location featuring more private beach and pool access.

Besides the adults-only river pool, Oz has two other pools—one of which is among the only rooftop pools in Barbados.

Oz's six onsite restaurant concepts range from no-shirt-no-shoes-required to bespoke private dining options. Elements is the beating heart of the property, situated between the two buildings of accommodations and serving up deluxe buffet breakfasts, sit-down lunches, and curated rotating dinner menus.

Oro, on the ninth floor of the newly constructed building, serves European-Caribbean cuisine in a sleek, sexy space with 270-degree views of the sea. Brisa, on the rooftop of the main building, is the perfect spot to grab a cocktail before dinner, enjoy tapas as the sun sets, or snag something sweet at the end of the night. Unlike many all-inclusives, Oz stocks a range of high-end wines and liquors.

And because it's vacation, no meal beats a casual seafood lunch from Bluefin. The snapper and fries served right to my poolside lounge chair felt like a true Bajan experience. The bar near the pool, Oasis, serves up cocktails, afternoon teas, and sweet treats throughout the day.



Oz's design is elevated but the pops of color bring it down to Earth. The main restaurant, Elements (below), has breezy, indoor/outdoor seating.

journeys

■ DESTINATION: BARBADOS

Oz's new Acqua spa, opened in February 2022, delivers luxury treatments on the eighth floor of the resort's new building (a floor below Oro). They have the only Hammam steam room on Barbados, and they use OSEA products throughout the spa. They offer massages, facials, signature body rituals, and manicures and pedicures, and they've recently introduced a new spa culinary menu for light, nutritious pick-me-ups in between treatments like strawberry mint bisque and fresh seafood ceviche. The white marble and the floor-to-ceiling windows affording views of the sea make tension almost impossible in a place like this.

Oz has two other sister properties in the Ocean Hotels Collection, both five minutes away: Sea Breeze Beach House, a boutique hotel with private beachfront and Bajan charm, and South Beach Hotel, a retro-inspired spacious all-suite property steps from the beach. Guests of Oz staying in the Luxury or Concierge collections have open access to Sea Breeze Beach House and its amenities, like an adults-only pool, watersports, and more creative restaurant concepts like fine-dining Cerulean, alfresco Aqua Terra, and De Rum Shop Cafe, located in a charming blue cottage.

While Oz has more than enough activities to keep guests busy throughout their stay, heading out on an excursion gave us a taste of Barbados' culture. We drove over to the rugged east coast for stunning views, checked out historical churches, and went for a rum tasting at Mount Gay. We stopped for lunch at Tides, an elevated Bajan cuisine spot situated right above the lapping waters of the west coast in a former post-war seaside home. On the island you can also explore botanical gardens, a boardwalk, Friday night fish fries, and natural wonders like caves.

Sitting under the shade of a palm tree by the pool with the crash of the waves behind me, I soaked up my last full day in Barbados. Like most tropical destinations, it's almost always sunny and warm—and a bit windy. But unlike some other tropical spots, the island pulses with energy. Relaxing in the balmy weather is great, but whatever the evening will bring might be better. ♦



The Acqua Spa (below) boasts brand new, dazzlingly bright state-of-the-art treatment facilities from its perch on the ninth floor overlooking the sea.



AUG
+
SEPT
2022

62

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