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House-Hunting in ... the Bahamas Real Estate in the Bahamas



A SIX-BEDROOM COMPOUND ON ELBOW CAY

\$2.5 MILLION

A 25-minute ferry ride from Marsh Harbour in the Abaco Islands' 120-mile-long chain, this recently renovated six-bedroom five-bath home, typically reached by golf cart, is down a gravel driveway through a porte-cochere marked "Point of View." Facing the calm, turquoise Sea of Abaco and the Atlantic Ocean, the compound, on 0.52 acres, has two beige stucco buildings or "pods" connected by a boardwalk with a gazebo between the two structures, said Kerry Sullivan of Damianos Sotheby's International Realty.

Up four wooden steps to a wraparound deck, the entry door of the main pod opens onto a hallway with a travertine marble floor that runs through the entertaining spaces on the first level, with wood floors in the loft. Off the hallway to the right is a full bath with access to a bedroom beyond. To the left is a staircase to the upper level. Straight ahead, the kitchen is outfitted with custom raised-panel eucalyptus cabinets, smoky granite countertops, a Viking gas range,

Grohe faucets, stainless steel GE Café Series appliances and granite countertops. A breakfast bar is open to the dining and living areas, where the vaulted 25-foot ceiling has tongue-and-groove cypress planking and exposed white beams.

Light streams through a high arched window, and panels of glass stretch across the back wall, with glass side doors opening to the deck. To the left of the dining area is a bedroom with a wrought-iron canopy bed and French doors leading to the deck. The home is being sold furnished.

Upstairs, a loft/game room with a Chippendale-style railing overlooks the main living space to one side and, on the other, opens through French doors to a balcony. A bedroom down the hall has a dormer and an arched window with sea views.

From the living room side of the 3,600-square-foot house, the deck leads in boardwalk fashion to a gazebo and the sleeping pod beyond. There, French doors open onto a master suite that has wall-to-wall windows with north and east sea views. Its bath has a single vanity with a granite countertop, an oversize travertine shower and a toilet. A second en-suite bedroom is on the ground level. The ground level of the main pod serves as a cabana and also has a bedroom and full bath.

Staircases from the gazebo and near the dining area lead down to an oval swimming pool surrounded by a wood-plank deck. A lattice pergola provides shade in one corner; in another, an outdoor fireplace can be used for cooking. Beyond a hedge to the east side of the property is a grassy sloped lawn.

A two-minute stroll down the road is a protected cove with a white-sand beach and a community dock with a boat slip. Ten minutes away by golf cart, the picturesque 1700s village of Hope Town has shops, restaurants, a school, churches and a 150-year-old, hand-operated lighthouse. Six-mile-long Elbow Cay, with a number of hotels, is a top boating, fishing and sailing destination.

MARKET OVERVIEW

Homes on Elbow Cay start at \$300,000 at the lower end, with prices on the water stretching from more than \$1 million to \$8 million. Inventory is higher now than during the recession, and sales in the first part of this year were “sluggish,” Ms. Sullivan said. “It is still a buyer’s market,” she said, “but we have already hit bottom and the prices are starting to go up.” Sellers in the luxury market, who typically own other homes, “are people who don’t need to sell” and wait if they do not get their price.

With the recent opening of a new international airport in Marsh Harbour, on Great Abaco Island, new developments on the Out Islands are “gaining momentum,” said Mark Pordes, the chief executive of Pordes Residential, the sales and marketing firm for Schooner Bay, an amenity-laden “harbor village” on Great Abaco with 450 home sites and the Verandah House, a six-unit condominium complex. About 40 cottages, villas and oceanfront estates are complete, with nearly a dozen more under construction. Prices range from \$395,000 to \$595,000 for condominiums and \$439,000 to \$4.5 million for houses, with oceanfront homes starting at \$1.8 million. “There is more confidence than a year ago. There are sales happening,” Mr. Pordes said. “People are talking about the [Bahamas](#) again.”

The Bahamas is “recovering slowly” from recession, said Larry Roberts, the chief executive of Bahamas Realty. Pockets such as Harbour Island and Lyford Cay are “fairly buoyant.”

In Nassau, Baha Mar, a \$3.5 billion luxury resort hotel, golf and casino project scheduled to open in December, includes 284 condominium units among the more than 1,000 hotel rooms, ranging from \$1.1 million for a one-bedroom residence at the Grand Hyatt to \$10 million for a beachfront villa at the Rosewood at Baha Mar hotel, said Anja Allen, the marketing manager for residential sales.

WHO BUYS IN THE BAHAMAS

While most foreign buyers are Americans, home purchases by Canadians are increasing, Ms. Sullivan said. Wealthy investors, also from France, Britain and Italy, buy properties and rent weekly to vacationers, said Alexander Alexiou, the owner and senior broker at Island Real Estate on Harbour Island. His 120 rental listings range from \$1,500 a week for a one-bedroom beachfront cottage to \$175,000 a week for a 14-bedroom home that includes beach access, a boat and the services of a chef.

BUYING BASICS

To purchase real estate, non-Bahamians must apply for either a certificate of registration or, for land, a permit, according to Ja’Ann Major, an associate with Higgs & Johnson, a Bahamian law firm.

WEBSITES

Bahamas Government site: bahamas.gov.bs

Abacos Tourism: myoutislands.com

Bahamas tourism site: bahamas.com

LANGUAGES AND CURRENCY

English; dollar (1 Bahamian dollar = \$1)

TAXES AND FEES

Property taxes, determined when a house is sold, are 0.75 percent for homes from \$250,000 to \$500,000 and 1 percent for homes from \$500,000 to \$50 million, Ms. Major said in an email message.

A stamp tax of 10 percent charged by the government is split between the buyer and seller. A 6 percent real estate commission is paid by the seller. Legal fees run 2.5 percent below \$250,000, 2 percent on homes from \$500,000 to \$1 million, 1 percent on homes from \$1 million and \$5 million, and 0.5 percent for properties exceeding \$5 million, charged cumulatively