

Home

Escape a grim British winter by buying an idyllic island bolt hole. By Cheryl Markosky

Those fretting about R numbers and whether Santa will come to Tier town this year will envy Richard White, who plans to spend the festive season in Barbados with his wife, Laure, and their relatives in a whitewashed villa – with its own pool and a nearby beach.

Instead of grappling with guidelines dictating how many people can gather, the 46-year-old financial data salesman from Hackney, east London, can accommodate his loved ones in his very own three-bedroom bolt hole at the Westmoreland Hills development on the island's west coast.

White purchased his place in the sun off-plan for \$500,000 (about £380,000) in December 2018, and gained possession the week before lockdown. "Initially I thought I'd rent it to pay for holidays on island, but with Covid it's become an escape route," he explains.

As well as hanging out in his new hideaway, White enjoys the liberty of attending cricket matches and visiting a local restaurant to eat Caribbean food, drink rum punch and dance. He wants to talk to his boss about being based for longer interludes at his Barbados house, which has ultrafast fibre broadband that's speedier than in London. "Working from home means it doesn't matter if I'm in Barnsley or Barbados."

White is one of many choosing to live for several months or more in the Caribbean, where Barbados has seen fewer than 300 cases of coronavirus. To travel to the island you need a negative PCR test, then on arrival you will be retested and quarantined for two days while awaiting the result. If you test negative again, you're free to roam.

As well as a careful test and quarantine regime, Barbados was first to launch a Welcome Stamp scheme, granting visas to live and work for a year for \$2,000 a person, or \$3,000 per family. Out of 1,430 approved applicants about 250 were from the UK, and the policy has been so successful that the government is considering extending it for another year.

Longer-term rentals for digital nomads are translating into property sales, points out Edward de Mallet Morgan, a partner in Knight Frank's super-prime international department. Viewings in Barbados increased by 34 per cent in the second quarter of 2020, attracting people who hadn't visited before.

"Some didn't think it made sense to own, as it was easier to rent. But now they're saying, 'Hang on, rather than two weeks we can stay for extended periods,'" he explains. Families get up at 5am (there's a four-hour time difference) so parents can work and children remote-school until lunchtime, followed by a swim, a round of golf, sailing or a beach trip.

It's a good time to buy, with price reductions of up to 30 per cent on older homes that have been on the market for six or more years, observes Andrew Blandford-Newson in Knight Frank's international residential sector. Outside space and access to a pool, a gym and a tennis court are top of purchasers' wish lists.

Last March the British architect Ian Adam-Smith, who is renovating Andy Murray's Surrey home, bought an original 1962 villa at Sandy Lane for \$550,000 through One Caribbean Estates. "I'm adding a new Great Room and a second courtyard, and constructing a two-bedroom cottage," says Adam-Smith, 54. He favours doing up an older house on an island that's in danger of losing its identity. He'll live on Barbados for a large portion of the year, with trips to the UK to see clients. His ten-year plan is to hand over the business to his architect sons, Mungo and Fergus, while he edges towards retirement.

Covid may be crippling the travel and hospitality sectors, but One Caribbean Estates' Chris Parra says property is booming. He's selling to "hedge fund managers and entrepreneurs wanting to migrate to warmer climates," including several properties to Noble Foods' Michael Kent – two houses at Sandy Lane, one at Port St Charles, and a beachside property with a next-door plot with space to build a 30,000 sq ft home.

Also proving popular is the Nomad Digital Residence scheme in Antigua, where individuals can live and work for two years (\$1,500 per person or \$3,000 a family). There's no need for visitors to

“Families get up at 5am so parents can work and children remote-school until lunch, followed by a swim, golf, sailing or a beach trip



quarantine after providing a negative test and undergoing temperature checks.

Rufus Gobat, the marketing director at Antigua's Tamarin Hills – where 60 homes have been built and another 28 are under construction – had a request from a tenant wanting a villa for three years, costing more than £200,000. In addition, Gobat has finalised four sales over the winter, including a \$1.2 million, three-bedroom townhouse for a retired UK lawyer keen to bring his wife and children to the island in January.

"Private homes are viewed as safer than staying in a hotel, as you're in contact with fewer staff," he notes. "People ask if they can bring their dogs, and want reassurance about medicine and level of security. Once they get here you see them working on the beach with wifi."

Purchasers generally favour places where there's plenty to do, according to James Burdess, head of Caribbean and Latin American sales in Savills' residential international department. He tips Canouan, a small island in the St Vincent and the Grenadines, as the getaway for the 2020s.

"It has a state-of-the-art marina, a championship golf course and a new Mandarin Oriental hotel. Soho Beach House launches soon, and an Aman hotel's on the way," he comments. The airport runway has been extended, making room for more private jets (it's estimated that 50 per cent of Mandarin Oriental's guests arrive there this way) and for Boeing 737s.

Large villas at the Mandarin Oriental, which range from \$8 million to \$15 million, appeal to those "who don't

usually spend winters partying in Courchevel, but instead prioritise being somewhere warm and connected to family," Burdess adds. So far 14 homes have been built, with 12 more to come. There's plenty to occupy parents as well as children, thanks to a spa, health and fitness facilities, tennis courts and restaurants.

Britons signing up to Beats (Bahamas Extended Access Travel Stay), which for an adult permit costs \$1,025 or a student's \$525, are checking out Baha Mar resort in Nassau. After home-schooling offspring, families can visit flamingos at the sanctuary park, play on one of nine tennis courts, get a culture fix at the art gallery, bet at the casino, or dine at the poolside restaurants.

"Most of the villas, priced from \$726,500, have balconies

BAHAMAS \$726,500

At the 1,000-acre Baha Mar Resort in the Bahamian capital, Nassau, one-bedroom flats, are available to buy. Also included is access to Cable Beach, two hotels, multiple restaurants, an art gallery and casino. bahamar.com

Right: Holetown Beach in Barbados, where the Welcome Stamp scheme grants visas to live and work for a year for \$2,000



BARBADOS \$1.3M

At Mahogany Heights, Royal Westmoreland, you get a modern three-bedroom townhouse right by the 12th hole of a Robert Trent Jones Jr golf course. It comes with a pool and a covered veranda. onecaribbeanestates.com





CANOUAN \$8.2M

A new stone, wood and glass villa with a pool and a Jacuzzi at the Mandarin Oriental resort. Homeowners can use all hotel amenities, including the spa, a wellness centre and a gym.

020 7016 3744, savills.com

and large dining tables. Room service is from the Rosewood Hotel – or a private chef can come and cook for you,” says Genevieve Conroy, vice-president of residential sales and marketing.

Lana Rademaker, from Damianos Sotheby's International Realty in Nassau, was renting a home to a UK family. Now, they're buying and getting their kids settled in schools. She says that Brits make up a third of her buyer base. Most want to be in Nassau, while interest has also been growing in Abaco and Eleuthera (where Lenny Kravitz hangs out in an Airstream trailer when he's not staying in his Paris mansion).

“Eleuthera is an island that is only a 20-minute plane hop away from Nassau, and it has plenty of space as well as untouched beaches,” Rademaker says, adding: “A house there close to the beach would cost you about \$750,000.”

When Kim Kardashian celebrated her 40th birthday with a group of friends this year she hired her very own private island, which she said was the epitome of a Covid-safe haven where you can “pretend things are normal”. Kardashian faced a backlash for her social media posts, but recently there has been a seven-fold increase in inquiries for private islands – and an increase in sales on the private island of Mustique in particular, according to de Mallet Morgan.

Rademaker says Sotheby's has just sold the 20-acre Abaco island Foot's Cay for about \$9 million, but buyers can expect to pay up to \$70 million for a grander version.

You won't get much safer than Jumby Bay, northeast of Antigua, where there are only private homes and a 40-room Rosewood hotel on the island. To get there you touch down at a private airport across the water, then pick up the Jumby Bay ferry and take a Covid test when you arrive, with results available in 20 minutes.

“There's a lot of space,” says property sales manager Andrew Robson. “Houses with their own tennis courts, pools and gyms are isolated in their own right, and owners can disappear into them for months. One guy has been running his department of an asset management firm from his compound.”

Robson has had six strong inquiries from British buyers hoping to check out properties for sale from \$9 million to \$30 million. “At this level, people have the money, and a private island's a sensible buy if you want winter sun.”

Add Covid security, a healthy lifestyle and relative freedom to the usual delights of unspoilt beaches and tropical cocktails, and buyers are waking up to the fact that a Caribbean house could be for life, not just for Christmas.

TIME AND SPACE THE WAY WE LIVE NOW



MELISSA HEMSLEY

The chef on what she found under the floorboards of her 19th-century home

Home, for me, smells of food. There's a messy kitchen table covered in recipe notes and books. There's always something to pick at, like cheese or a fruit bake. You know how some people are precious about books? In my house books are splattered with food. It's cosy, busy, blustery and messy. I live in a Victorian house in Leytonstone, east London. It's my first grown-up home, the only place I've had with a garden since living with my parents.

Where did you spend your childhood?

My dad was in the army, so reckon I lived in ten or twelve army houses. It was exciting, you meet lots of new people, but sometimes I felt a bit jealous of those who could put down roots and knew everybody and had friends for life.

What did you eat growing up?

My mum is Filipina and she didn't have a

lot of choice when she was growing up. I don't remember anyone centring a meal around meat or fish. It was always about vegetables and flavours or a braised bit of meat that lasted for multiple meals. My dad has passed away now, but we would have honey on toast together instead of pudding. What's better than that?

What is the worst place you've lived in?

I lived in Stockwell with my boyfriend [the art curator Henry Relph]. I had an amazing pub, the Canton Arms, next to me, but we lived right on the roundabout where it was noisy and it was harder to get to green space. Living near Wanstead Flats now with a dog has been my saving grace.

What's your dog's name?

She's called Nelly and she's a staffie. She shakes when there are fireworks, but we bought her a ThunderShirt. You wrap it around your dog and it holds them tight.



The cookery writer at her home in Leytonstone with her beloved staffie, Nelly. Below: nearby Leyton High Road

What is your house like now?

Henry did up the Stockwell flat, sold it and we managed to buy this house. It was built in 1878, I think. Hopefully we'll grow into it with kids. Usually from Thursday to Monday it's full of godkids and people who come to stay. We stripped the floorboards and found old copies of the local newspaper, which had a front page about Mussolini. Henry likes mid-century, clean interiors, but he's not the boss of me, so my rugs and cushions get thrown in. I like to be comfortable.

Do you garden?

We've been here for four years and we're only just paying attention to the garden. I've got the world's smallest aubergines, as well as some yellow courgettes, chard, rocket that came from nowhere and loads of herbs. I love it because it's fragrant and practical. When I've had a bad day I pick some veg and it does wonders.

How are you coping with lockdown?

It's very hard to plan ahead. I think it might be the army upbringing, but I've always prided myself on having a freezer full of food. When my friends are pregnant I just fill up their freezer. Back in March it was super scary and I had to quell a lot of that. I couldn't watch the news before bed. Henry would have it on and I'd say, “Turn down Boris, he's stressing me out.”

I started doing a lot of cooking for Olio, the neighbourhood sharing app, and I threw myself into baking for a breast cancer charity. We delivered food to the staff at St George's hospital. I just thought, what can I do? I can cook, so I'll do lots of that then.

Any lockdown cooking tips?

Going into autumn, have a simple lentil or squash-based dish that you can add to. It's batch cooking, but you're not eating the same flavours every night. Add some harissa one night, some garlic yogurt or miso another night. People are eating in the way that makes them feel good at the moment. We've tried really hard to eat our meals at the table. Shut your laptop and have some time away. I've started a series called Laptop-free Lunches; it's not just what you eat, it's the way you eat it.

Interview by Melissa York

Melissa Hemsley regularly collaborates with Black Bee Honey, an award-winning British honey brand, blackbeehoney.com

