

Q&A with Keith A. Martel, General Manager, Tamarind Hills, Antigua & Barbuda



All photos courtesy of Tamarind Hills

Atop a scenic bluff on the coastal nexus between Darkwood and Ffryes beach, Tamarind Hills has carved out a reputation as one of Antigua's most luxurious getaways. This scenic collection of oceanfront villas dazzles with its variety and quality, offering private pools, lavishly appointed living spaces, and robust amenities in the sun kissed heart of the Caribbean.

In the wake of the pandemic, Tamarind is exploring new dimensions, supplementing its traditional villa offering with all-new luxury suites and ambitious new facilities. General Manager, Keith Martel is the man in the eye of this hurricane of change, leveraging decades of luxury property experience to take the vaunted resort to new heights.

In true pandemic fashion, we caught up with Keith over Zoom to talk in-depth about the property, the character of Antigua, and his own personal journey.



Tell us about your journey. How did you become the manager of a luxury property in Antigua?

I'm originally from Guernsey, and I've been in the industry for many years. Much of my earlier career was in London and the South of England before an opportunity presented itself to launch a property in St. Lucia. In 2000 my wife and I came to Antigua after I accepted a position as the GM of Blue Waters. From that point on, I just continued to get involved with launches, relaunches, and project management; I worked with Hermitage Bay and Sugar Ridge among others before Tamarind brought me on to launch their post-COVID transition around 18 months ago.



What do you think has been your greatest challenge as a manager?

To some degree, the greatest challenge is the property itself: Tamarind Hills is a very high-end property, and so ensuring that the quality continually meets a high bar requires exceptional supervision.

I would also say that, at least initially when I worked in St Lucia all those years ago, some challenge came from getting acquainted with the famously laid-back mindset of the Caribbean. There was certainly an adjustment period for me, coming in with a more traditional Western mindset and then adapting that to the pace of Antigua. The motto I've taken to heart: things get done eventually, but you must never compromise on standards.



How has Antigua changed since you came to the island?

I've been in Antigua since 2000 and, remarkably, it hasn't changed very much until quite recently. The 365 beaches are still as beautiful as ever, and the island is incredibly green. As the saying goes "tourism kills tourism", and I think Antigua has avoided that pitfall by remaining as untouched and non-commercial as possible. There are no Hiltons or Marriotts on the island - you'll find instead that many properties are private or locally owned. Moreover, the people haven't changed one bit: they are as proud of their home and as welcoming as ever.

The change has mostly been in infrastructure: expanded harbours, yacht berths, road systems, that sort of thing. Antigua's economy actually survived quite well through COVID, and so there is new investment in education and realizing the population's basic needs. Things are going in a positive direction.



How would you describe Antigua to someone who has never been?

It's beautiful beaches as far as the eye can see and open countryside dotted with lovely little villages. A safe and welcoming place: I don't lock my car here because I don't need to. The friendly people are really the island's true treasure.

Putting on your managerial hat for a second, what are some of the "must-do's" you recommend to guests at Tamarind Hills?

There is a saying on the island that "you can't come to Antigua without going to Shirley Heights on a Sunday Night", and that's definitely true. A short hike up offers a magnificent view down the Atlantic side and up the Caribbean side, along with steelpan music and barbecue. You'll also be directly above Nelson's Dockyard, a naval fort which dates back to the 1700s, and is one of the world's UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

The other thing I would heartily recommend is getting a boat and sailing the seas around Antigua - and not just because it's what my wife and I do on our days off. Whether it's a private charter or just a public jolly boat, the waters are perfect. For something quieter, go for a private charter and just follow the trade winds and the shore: there are numerous beaches only accessible by boat, and all of them are postcard perfect.

What's the latest at Tamarind Hills? What can guests look forward to?

The 43 luxury suites that we launched last year are getting rave reviews and add a new dimension to Tamarind Hills well known as a Villa only resort. The existing 12 luxury beach and ocean front two-, three- and four-bedroom villas, will soon be supplemented by a further 4 ocean front villas with the finishing touches currently being put in place. They have the most amazing views imaginable! Our Sunset Bar and Beach Club are set to open in May, whilst a fabulous full-service restaurant and bar with adjacent infinity edge pool will open in October

After that, we are done with construction: guests can look forward to luxury suites and villas that surpass expectations, along with the peace and quiet Antigua is so famous for.

Click [here](#) to access these high res. photos of Tamarind Hills.

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About Antigua and Barbuda

Antigua (pronounced An-tee'ga) and Barbuda (Bar-byew'da) is located in the heart of the Caribbean Sea. Voted the World Travel Awards 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 Caribbean's Most Romantic Destination, the twin-island paradise offers visitors two uniquely distinct experiences, ideal temperatures year-round, a rich history, vibrant culture, exhilarating excursions, award-winning resorts, mouth-watering cuisine and 365 stunning pink and white-sand beaches - one for every day of the year. The largest of the Leeward Islands, Antigua comprises 108-square miles with rich history and spectacular topography that provides a variety of popular sightseeing opportunities. Nelson's Dockyard, the only remaining example of a Georgian fort a listed UNESCO World Heritage site, is perhaps the most renowned landmark. Antigua's tourism events calendar includes the prestigious Antigua Sailing Week, Antigua Classic Yacht Regatta, and the annual Antigua Carnival; known as the Caribbean's Greatest Summer Festival. Barbuda, Antigua's smaller sister island, is the ultimate celebrity hideaway. The island lies 27 miles north-east of Antigua and is just a 15-minute plane ride away. Barbuda is known for its untouched 17 mile stretch of pink sand beach and as the home of the largest Frigate Bird Sanctuary in the Western Hemisphere.

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