



BELMOND
LA SAMANNA
ST MARTIN



PRESS KIT

Belmond La Samanna introduced by Amanda Woods

OVERVIEW

St Martin pulses with Caribbean soul, a spirit that brings together this unique island of two parts. While the 21 square miles in the north are French, the 16 square miles to the south are Dutch: each has its own personality yet lives happily alongside the other.

On the westernmost point of the island, just to the French side of the dividing line, Belmond La Samanna is renowned for fusing Gallic flair with tropical verve. The island's only five star resort, this beautiful retreat is set across 55 acres of lush tropical gardens and soft white sand.

The resort's crescent-shaped beach on Baie Longue is considered one of the most pristine and secluded in the world. Guests can savour the turquoise waters in tranquillity as Belmond La Samanna is the only hotel with access to the private sands.

Pathways lined with hibiscus and bougainvillea weave between the 83 whitewashed guest rooms, which are divided into 56 Suites and 27 Deluxe Ocean View Rooms.

Every light-flooded guest room and suite has a walkout patio or covered terrace overlooking the beach, while the interiors are luxuriously and intimately arranged with graceful archways, marble or Caribbean-style bathrooms, teak accents and ink blue fabrics.

Those travelling with family or friends can opt to stay in one of the three-bedroom cottages with private patios or in one of the three- and four-bedroom villas with private infinity pools and wraparound terraces. All cottages are located directly on the beach while villas are perched on a clifftop overlooking the resort.

While Belmond La Samanna is just 5km from Marigot, the capital of French St Martin, and a short drive from the restaurants of Grand Case, some of the finest dining on the island is within the resort itself.

Every day the chef sources ingredients from the local market and transforms them into sumptuous French and Caribbean specialities.

At Trellis guests dine on traditional French cuisine in this elegant bistro's chic dining room or on a terrace with panoramic views of the sea. Interlude serves breakfast, dinner and drinks on a patio beside the main swimming pool, while the Beach Bar offers salads, grilled fish and light bites on a shaded terrace. Snacks and signature cocktails are also served throughout the day at Baie Longue Bar.

Belmond La Samanna's 15,000-bottle wine cellar, La Cave, boasts one of the most extensive wine selections in the Caribbean. When softly illuminated by candlelight at night, it is a

wonderful setting for a private group dinner. The chef will help guests to curate their own tasting menu, complemented by fine wines from the surrounding shelves.

The hotel's main, 30ft-long swimming pool lies alongside Interlude restaurant, while the second 15ft-long freeform infinity pool, framed by rocks and agave plants, provides a backdrop for the Beach Bar.

The resort's many sporting facilities include three tennis courts, a fitness centre and a yoga and pilates pavilion. Professionals are available for tennis classes, personal training and other wellness instruction.

The La Samanna Spa is known as one of the finest in the Caribbean, with many guests making it the focus of their stay. This leafy, tropical hideaway offers an array of rejuvenating and relaxing massages and treatments using Sisley and Pure Altitude products.

Equally re-energising are the many opportunities to get out and about around the resort. Great activities include trips along the coast or island excursions by private boat. Many hotel guests are couples who are marking a special occasion and who choose to take a helicopter ride to enjoy the dramatic scenery from above. The "romance concierge" can arrange for a special message such as a proposal to be spelt out in coconuts shells on the beach.

Belmond La Samanna caters for weddings and events large and small with the Rendezvous Pavilion accommodating up to 100 guests and the main pool deck hosting celebrations of up to 300 people.

With its sunsets over aquamarine seas, indulgent dining and gentle ambience, Belmond La Samanna may be wildly romantic - but children are warmly welcomed at the resort. French- and English-speaking nannies are available to supervise the youngsters and teach them special arts and crafts or take them on treasure hunts. Each child receives an amenities kit including beach buckets, armbands and colouring sets.

The hotel is pet friendly, too, and allows dogs of up to 25 pounds to accompany their owners for a supplementary fee. These pampered pooches receive their own amenities kits and a luxurious basket in which to curl up and snooze.

While this exclusive and secluded haven may feel like it's a world away, it is only ten minutes from the second largest airport in the Northeast Caribbean.

Visitors to St Martin enjoy daily direct flights from the U.S, Canada, France and the Netherlands. With cities including New York, Chicago and Toronto only four hours away, Belmond La Samanna is surprisingly easy to reach. Although after falling in love with this precious part of the Caribbean it may not be so easy to leave.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

When businessman James Frankel first saw the sweeping view across Baie Longue it was love at first sight. Within an hour he had bought the land on the cliff overlooking the beach and was dreaming of building a holiday house for his family.

After discovering the area was zoned for a hotel rather than a home, he decided to build a resort where he could entertain friends. But what to call it? He looked to the first letters of his daughters' names: Samantha, Anouk and Nathalie.

Frankel turned to architect Happy Ward, who had designed the original Sandy Lane hotel in Barbados, to create a luxury hotel in a Mediterranean villa style.

When it opened its doors in 1972 getting to St Martin was an adventure in itself. There were no direct flights and only one road around the island. But La Samanna swiftly made its name as the jewel of the Caribbean.

The Kennedys, Richard Nixon, Diana Ross and the grand dame of L'Oreal, Lilliane Bettencourt, are among those who regularly escaped to this magical bay. Today, Belmond La Samanna continues to attract presidents and stars including Oprah Winfrey and Channing Tatum.

James B Sherwood, founder of Orient-Express Hotels (now Belmond), is one guest who was to play a key role in the hotel's history; in 1996 he decided to add it to his collection of extraordinary hotels and luxury trains. Over the intervening 20-plus years the hotel has enjoyed many refurbishments, including a complete renovation in 2012. Happily, however, the essence of Belmond La Samanna remains unchanged.

PEOPLE

Michael Schoonewagen, General Manager

For almost 30 years Michael Schoonewagen lived the classic hotel manager's life, moving from place to place around the world every few years. Since becoming General Manager at Belmond La Samanna, however, Michael wants to stay just where he is.

As a child Michael lived in Cape Town and Cannes, and attended boarding school in Switzerland. After completing his diploma at the Hotel Career Centre in Bournemouth in the United Kingdom, he studied Hotel and Tourism Management at the Centre International de Glion in Switzerland.

His first job was as a receptionist at Loews Monte-Carlo; he went on to work at a number of top hotels including the Palace Hotel Moscow and Hotel Savoy Portugal before becoming General Manager of the Indian Resort & Spa in Mauritius.

Michael was working as the General Manager of the St Regis Bora Bora when he was contacted by Belmond. At the time he had been working there for four years and his wife and two children were 36 hours away in France. He was ready for a new challenge and within an hour he was all set to move on. While most changes of this nature involve prior visits, Michael and his family saw St Martin for the first time when he started his new job.

"It felt like New York after Bora Bora." Michael laughs. "There are 400 restaurants and 37 beaches. It's dynamic but laid back at the same time with a great quality of life."

Michael says it's the people who make his job so enjoyable, and he soon came to know the hotel's many regular guests. At any given time almost half of the rooms are taken by repeat visitors. Come Christmas and the percentage rises to 85%, giving the hotel the feel of a house party with friends.

"Within 24 hours you realise there is something very special about this resort. I don't know why." Michael smiles. "I've been in the hotel business for 27 years and I've never had so many people say to me 'you feel good in this hotel'."

Michael has had a lifelong fascination with planes and when he's not at Belmond La Samanna he can be found in a flight simulator or making videos from the footage he films with his drone.

The dramatic take offs and landings that come with the short runway at St Martin's airport also make for entertaining plane spotting, and along with soaking up the sunshine Michael relaxes by watching the planes fly in and out of his corner of paradise.

EXPERIENCES

Tours and Activities

While the hotel's concierge can arrange a variety of tours around St Martin and neighbouring islands, one of the highlights of any visit to Belmond La Samanna is spending time on the hotel's private beach.

Guests can simply float in the year-round warm waters of one of the most beautiful beaches in the world, or get active with ocean kayaks, stand-up paddleboards, wave runners, flyboards and snorkel gear.

Belmond La Samanna is the only resort on the island to offer SeaBobs, the top-of-the-line electric underwater scooters that allow guests to easily explore both the surface and under the sea.

Four beach cabanas with tent tops and beautifully billowing curtains provide a luxurious base complete with complimentary champagne, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth speakers.

The 15ft-by-15ft cabanas feature wraparound lounge beds and extra large pillows, and a shower for freshening up after dips in the sea. Lunch and bar service is also available.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY & ENVIRONMENT

Belmond La Samanna is in the process of implementing three environmental projects.

The first, which was completed in 2016, saw the hotel install a greywater plant that treats around 300,000 litres of water a day. The freshly treated water is now used to irrigate 44 hectares of gardens around the resort, saving the tap water that was once used on the gardens and the large volumes of water sent to the island's treatment plant.

The second, set to be completed in 2017, is building a 10,000 square metre solar panel farm, which will allow the hotel to be completely self-reliant for electricity.

The third, planned for 2018, is to introduce a desalination plant that will turn the seawater on the hotel's doorstep into fresh water for the hotel.

As well as working to reduce its environmental impact, the hotel has created a new programme to help young people from some of St Martin's less fortunate areas.

The Lend a Hand programme offers 20 young unemployed people a two-month paid apprenticeship at the hotel. Upon completion, the hotel permanently employs those who are ready to become part of the Belmond family.

Since the programme began between three and five people a year have seen their apprenticeship turn into full time careers at Belmond La Samanna.