

Hospitality

A Destination Within a Destination



The beach at CuisinArt Golf Resort & Spa on Anguilla's Rendezvous Bay

An Interview with **Stephane Zaharia**,
Vice President/General Manager, CuisinArt Golf Resort & Spa

EDITORS' NOTE *Stephane Zaharia began his career in the hospitality business with the Hyatt Corporation, quickly working his way up the management ladder at the company's U.S. properties. In 2001, Hyatt moved Zaharia to their resort and casino property in Aruba, West Indies, where he was Director of Rooms. In 2003, Zaharia moved to Ian Shragger Hotels as Hotel Manager of the Sanderson in London. Zaharia came to the Caribbean in 2004, serving as Resort Manager at Carlisle Bay in Antigua before accepting the position of Vice President/General Manager at CuisinArt Golf Resort & Spa.*



Stephane Zaharia

PROPERTY BRIEF *Nestled in the crescent curve of Anguilla's Rendezvous Bay, CuisinArt Golf Resort & Spa (CuisinArtResort.com) is an award-winning oasis of luxury. Inspired by the style of the Mediterranean, guests discover an enclave of 98 suites and villas surrounded by lush gardens and the pristine beach. CuisinArt Golf Resort & Spa celebrates the art of well-being while enticing guests with exceptional culinary experiences and the ultimate in relaxation and rejuvenation. The resort is home to an 18-hole championship golf course designed by the world renowned Greg Norman.*

What excited you about joining the property in 2005 and how has it evolved since then?

As an independently owned property, there is a different dynamic in terms of how the resort operates. I was immediately drawn to the resort's entrepreneurial spirit. Unlike a corporate resort with strict structures and procedures, we have the ability to make quick decisions based on the needs of our guests.

There are many parts of the business that have evolved since I joined. Regardless of the economic turndown, our business has continued to grow and we are proud to say that 60 percent of our guests are return guests. We are always looking to improve and keep up with the latest trends in the industry, yet we pride ourselves on our authenticity and staying true to our original DNA.

How do you characterize the property when it has so many components?

We are a destination within a destination. Our guests never have to leave the property during their stay, as we provide everything a guest could want or need.

As our name suggests, we exemplify the 'art of cuisine' and invite guests to embark on an epicurean immersion. Our Executive Chef, Jasper Schneider, and his team, have combined their talents to create exceptional menus at each of our five restaurants, providing a true global experience. Guests will also discover our 18-hole Greg Norman Signature Championship Golf Course, renowned as one of the best courses in the Caribbean. Our award-winning Venus Spa is recognized for the latest in therapeutic treatments and state of the art spa technology. Of course, there's always our magnificent beachfront, where guests can relax and enjoy the sights and sounds of Rendezvous Bay.

How broad is the cuisine offering?

Our culinary program is inspired by flavors from all over the world. We are the first resort in the world to introduce a Hydroponic Farm, and our global culinary experience incorporates local flavors and the freshest ingredients.

We have five restaurants and each distinct venue has a unique identity. Guests can get a taste of the Caribbean at our Beach Bar; a fine-dining experience at our award-winning French restaurant – Le Bistro at Santorini; authentic Japanese food at Tokyo Bay; time-honored Italian specialties at Italia, and more. Our epicurean journey extends beyond dining, affording guests the opportunity to partake in a variety of hands-on cooking classes, educational tours of our Hydroponic Farm, and wine tastings in our wine cellar featuring 3,600 bottles of rare vintages.

How broad is your range of accommodations?

Our 98 accommodations range from Junior Suites to Villas, all of which are located just steps away from the ocean. With the rise in multigenerational travel, there is a high demand for private villas and we offer villas with two, three, or five bedrooms. All villas feature private pools and special services and amenities, including private chefs and a concierge.

With regard to the spa, do you manage that yourself or do you partner on it?

Everything at the resort is owned and managed by us. The 27,000-square-foot Venus Spa is one of the largest in the Caribbean. Designed to capture the natural beauty and essence of Anguilla, our Venus Spa features 16 treatment rooms including rooms for couples, VIP suites with outdoor terraces and showers, wet rooms, lavish massage and

facial rooms, and a Men's Club Room. Our trained spa therapists are well-versed in customized facials, hydrotherapy, aromatherapy massages, and more. The Venus Spa is also known for its 'farm to face' program or treatments that are inspired by a selection of herbs grown on-site at our Hydroponic Farm.

How important is the group business and how large can those offerings get?

Group and incentive business is an extremely important part of our profile. From 2008-2009, there was a decline in group business, but over the past couple of years, we've seen significant growth in this sector. When we have a group staying at the resort, it's not only about a conference room. Our groups typically enjoy golf, culinary activities, the spa, and more. Groups are a key component for our overall business and we're committed to providing an unforgettable experience for all groups, whether they are traveling for business or leisure.

How important has it been to focus on service standards and have you been able to find the local talent you need?

As a family-owned resort, we treat our staff like family. We send a very strong message ensuring everybody knows how important their role is in contributing to the success of this business.

There are always challenges and our biggest challenge is maintaining consistency. The fact that we are part of The Leading Hotels of the World gives us an international certificate of guaranteed quality service. 'Secret shoppers' from Leading Hotels of the World routinely visit the property for inspection and I'm proud to say that we always receive very high scores. As mentioned, 60 percent of our guests are repeat, and this says a lot about what we're doing when it comes to satisfying our guests' needs and establishing long-term, personal relationships.

Are you happy with how accessibility to the resort has evolved with things like airlift?

It is crucial for our business. Our relationship with the airline companies and the local government is important, especially when we're based in the Caribbean.

Over the past couple of years, we have seen growth in airline service to the region, especially from Jet Blue. We have two routes to get to the island, either direct through St. Maarten, which you can get to from the East Coast, Midwest, and from the South; there is also a route through Puerto Rico. Both routes offer a relatively easy commute and we look forward to seeing additional travel options in the future. ●