

## CHARLEVOIX SKIING

Quebec resort promotes some "free" skiing and accommodations, T2



# TRAVEL

### > ISLAND LIFE



Looking out onto verdant Belle Mont Farm and Irie Fields golf course, guest houses dot the foothills of 3,800-foot Mt. Liamuiga in St. Kitts.

OWEN ROBERTS PHOTOS FOR THE TORONTO STAR

# Visiting a farm with breezy charm

Forage for food amid million-dollar views at Belle Mont Farm in beautiful St. Kitts

**OWEN ROBERTS**  
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

When I told my wife I was taking her to a farm for a Valentine's Day getaway, and that we'd have to forage for our own food, I felt a distinct chill in the air. But her mood thawed considerably when she discovered where the farm was.

I let it drop that the accommodation was an ultra-luxurious, private guest house in tropical, breezy St. Kitts. It had a million-dollar view and, I added, a five-star chef was to cook the ingredients we gathered.

Our destination was Belle Mont Farm, the focus of an ambitious \$600-million project called Kittitian Hill that opened

in December.

Kittitian Hill is a 400-acre property at the northwest part of the island, away from the traditional tourist areas.

It's located high above sea level, in the foothills of 3,800-foot Mt. Liamuiga, so there's almost always a cooling breeze blowing.

Behind the property, a seemingly endless, dense rainforest engulfs the mountain. The development consists of the farm, 84 single-room guest houses and seven multi-family units, a spa, restaurants and other facilities and all these things are in various states of completion.

ST. KITTS continued on T9



## > IF YOU GO

**Bring your appetite**  
Foraging for the ingredients for your evening meal will mean you enjoy it.

From left, chef Christophe Letard, spa manager Nickie Myers and farm manager Yasun Tafari invite visitors to forage for their own food at Belle Mont Farm.

# The farm comes first at Kittitian Hill

ST. KITTS from T1

These all blend below into a nine-hole golf course called Irie Fields and abandoned sugar cane fields that will become another nine holes for the course mid-year and further developed farmland.

From our guest house, we could see magnificent, uninterrupted views of the Caribbean Sea and the nearby islands of St. Eustatius, St. Barts, St. Martin and Saba. They were clearly visible from our spacious deck, from our metallic black pearl infinity pool, from our private outdoor shower and from inside, through towering three-metre-high glass and louvered doors that fold in for a completely open view.

At night, we closed the doors, flicked a switch and down came a classroom-size, three-metre-wide projection screen for watching larger-than-life Netflix offerings. It was like our own drive-in theatre.

By now, my wife's mood was now well, er, tropical. She agreed Kittitian Hill is a gem. And, indeed, it's priced as one. The published online booking rate for our guest house (double occupancy) was a princely \$2,250 U.S. per day. That includes all the food, drinks, golf and spa visits you can fit in.

But despite the opulence of the guest houses and the main buildings with their cut-stone exteriors, designer interiors and coral walkways, gritty, tiny Belle Mont Farm is held out as the key attraction there. It's the apple of Kittitian Hill founder, Val Kempadoo's eye.

Kempadoo, a successful native Trinidadian real estate developer, rose through the ranks as an organic farmer and later as an owner of nurseries across the Caribbean. He believes food and food production, regardless of the scale, opens doors for conversations and lessons about sustainability and social responsibility.

This includes replacing imports with locally grown food, making jobs for Kittitians, so they don't get cheated of their livelihood as they did when the sugar cane industry shut down a decade ago.

It's at the farm that Kempadoo wants food production and nature to be in harmony and he hopes Belle Mont Farm inspires others to be like-

minded.

To him, that journey centres around guests, such as we are, having our own farm-to-table experience. We mosey through the two-acre terraced fruit and vegetable farm, getting guidance from staff to pick what's in season from the dozens of fruit and vegetable varieties there.

Our harvest of cherry tomatoes, arugula and various other greens are delivered in stainless mixing bowls to Kittitian Hill's accomplished executive chef, Christophe Letard. We'd later enjoy the fruits of our labour in the open-air main dining room. Some meals were delivered to our guest house. Most memorable were delicious warm fish rotis and empanadas that awaited us the minute we arrived after a gruelling seven-hour hike up Mt. Liamuiga and back.

Belle Mont Farm's fertile ground gives the chef many possibilities. The rich volcanic topsoil is easily a metre deep in some places, perfect for fostering plant life of all kinds. Even the golf course is billed as an edible experience, with fruit-bearing trees replacing the ornamentals you'd see on other courses. Everything grows quickly with this soil and climate, so the chef always has something new on the menu.

The real challenge here is how to grow food without the modern pesticides that make wide-scale farming possible elsewhere. Insects and plant diseases flourish in the moist, humid weather and linger in the soil. Sometimes the only way to deal with diseases such as fusarium is to abandon the plot, seed elsewhere and try growing something less susceptible to the disease.

Despite these challenges, Belle Mont Farm won't waver from its farm-to-table mission, promises Kittitian Hill general manager, Carlos Salazar.

"We are a farm with guest houses, and not the other way around," he says. "The farm is central to what we are, and we are committed to making this work."

It turned out to be a great place to spend Valentine's Day. Or for that matter, any day.

Owen Roberts was a guest of Kittitian Hill. Follow him on his blog at [urbancowboy.ca](http://urbancowboy.ca), on twitter at [@theurbancowboy](https://twitter.com/theurbancowboy) and on instagram at [urbancowboyglobal](https://www.instagram.com/urbancowboyglobal)