

# MANSION GLOBAL

## Shopping for a Luxury Home? Get a (Free) Getaway Along With It

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High-end developers of resort-residences are offering likely buyers brief—and sometimes free—mini-vacations in specially designed tents, cabins and cabanas

Some of the world’s most luxurious resorts are borrowing a pitch from the Costco aisle: They are offering bite-sized samples to shoppers.

Although the Four Seasons Caye Chapel Resort and Residences in Belize doesn’t officially open for three more years, the island property has created four tricked-out beach tents to host mini-getaways for potential buyers.

“I love going down there and staying in the tents—they have every luxury: air-conditioning, a teak-floor shower with all these beautiful lotions, an espresso maker,”

said Sara Cady, a 48-year-old Austin, Texas-resident whose family has visited the island resort property twice. “We did everything from temple-ruin tours to scuba diving, to fishing, to sunset cruises, to jet-skiing.”

#### Bite-Sized Luxury Getaways

High-end developments offer brief stays in tents, cabanas and other custom-built spaces to pre-screened prospective buyers.

The price of admission: a refundable \$10,000 deposit, which Ms. Cady, a Gyrotonic studio owner, and her husband Steve, a retired sales executive, paid last June. The deposit also secured a spot on Caye Chapel’s Founders List, giving them dibs on one of its first-available oceanfront homesites. There are 15 homesites currently for sale, ranging in price from \$2.1 million to \$4 million. So far, the resort has hosted 33 visits, and taken deposits from 37 buyers.

High-end resorts still in the build-out stage are offering no-strings-attached stays in handsomely-appointed cabanas, tiny houses and glamping tents designed to lure prescreened prospective buyers. Visits—which can range anywhere from one night, to three or four—are carefully curated, with staff on hand to serve meals, or to arrange a day of skeet-shooting, mountain biking or shark-watching.

Although the Cadys covered their own travel costs to Belize City, the resort developers paid for almost everything else: transport to the island, cocktails and meals, massages, snorkeling, paddleboarding and boat excursions. Once the development’s 50 oceanfront homesites have sold, the tents may be moved to a nature preserve on the 280-acre island, to serve as a glamping destination for residents and guests.

Developers say the try-before-you-buy approach works better than a glossy sales brochure, giving prescreened prospects a chance to experience the place and some of its amenities before a resort is fully developed—which can translate into more sales.

While Caye Chapel relies on its sales staff to vet potential buyers—some of whom have been courted at private lunches and dinners—other resort developers require an online application or a financial statement before rolling out the welcome mat.



“We limit this to only qualified prospective owners...who appreciate what we are creating,” said Ron Barnes, a senior partner in the Mountainside at Northstar development, a new resort community in Truckee, Calif., that has invested \$500,000 in three glass-walled “rendezvous cabins” for temporary stays.

The 400-square-foot tiny houses—which have floor-to-ceiling windows, rough-hewed pine floors and showers with river rock floors—sit within walking distance of a yoga studio and a central lodge and fitness center. Resident concierges, dubbed ‘outfitters’, are on hand to plan day hikes, book heli-skiing outings and make dinner reservations.

Those interested in buying at Mountainside—where prices for homes start at \$1.75 million—can book a weekend in one of the cabins, provided they qualify via a financial statement and commit to a tour of the community. There is no charge for the stay, other than a nominal cleaning fee.



Resorts with extensive amenities already in place are more likely to charge prospective home buyers for a trial visit. Whitetail Club, a 1,300-acre private club and community in McCall, Idaho, charges \$295 in high season for a night in one of its five “Discovery Cottages”: 750-square-foot homes with pitched roofs, white oak floors and fieldstone fireplaces which are reserved for owners and prospective buyers. The cottages have the same exterior and interior finishes as larger homes now being built across the street—called Shore Lodge Cottages—which are priced between \$739,000 and \$949,000.

Snake River Sporting Club—an 800-acre resort about 20 miles south of Jackson, Wyo., where 62 homes sites cost between \$695,000 and \$3.2 million—unveiled its “discovery village” of four tiny homes, kitted out with Restoration Hardware furnishings and homey touches like vintage Scrabble boards. (The houses, like the ones at Mountainside, were built by Wheelhaus, a Jackson-based firm, and will eventually be removed). Guests are welcomed with a handwritten note from the club’s professional angler and a set of hand-tied flies. Visitors pay a high-season fee of \$325 per night, plus a \$50 daily club fee.

Paul Strong, A 60-year-old North Carolina resident who is retired from the oil industry, spent over \$2 million on a house at Snake River Sporting Club last August, after several visits there—the first for a golf tournament in 2016. “Two of my friends were visiting with me to play in the golf tournament, and each of us had a tiny house. We would have dinner at the club, and then go back and smoke a cigar and have a glass of wine at the fire pit,” Mr. Strong said.



Real-life glitches can disrupt even the most painstakingly staged trial vacation. Visitors who try out Snake River Sporting Club's Discovery Village this summer may be in for a less tranquil experience, due to ongoing construction at the club—a fact reflected in the sharp reduction of fees from last summer's peak rate of \$500 per night.

Noisy earthmovers aren't the only liability encountered by adventuresome resort beta-testers. Ms. Cady's most recent trip to Caye Chapel in April was marred by a storm with high winds.

"We had to vacate our tents early in the morning," she said. "Our tent was flooded and torn in spots—but the staff took care of it as if nothing had happened."