

'Kids see a 24-year-old with a Mercedes parked in the driveway as more successful than someone with a master's degree.'

—Knox Russell  
Bahama Princess Resort



**Landscape superintendent Knox Russell is one of the few Bahamians educated in landscape management.**

"We suffer here on the islands landscape-wise," Russell says. "They accept designs from Florida, and half the time the designers don't even see the property, so there's problems with tree roots or too much greenery."

Annuals are too expensive to plant, except occasionally in front of the entrance sign. So, where he can, Russell plants flowering trees and native plants which provide color almost year-round.

One unique tree, native to the island, is the "powder puff," which blooms fuschia flowers resembling

powder puffs. The "firecracker" is a plant named for its hot-pink buds which literally pop when stepped on.

Crotons used in many of the beds provide eye-catching purplish color, while salvia bursts of red, purple and yellow. Oleanders and bougainvillea also break up the green monotony.

But perhaps the most recognized color surrounding the Princess is the hibiscus. "It's a common practice to use it as a hedge," Russell says, "but I just let it grow."

Hibiscus flowers are often used to decorate tables in the restaurants.

#### **Inside/outside**

Russell's crew of two supervisors and five workers is responsible for all plants used inside the Princess buildings, as well as the surrounding landscape. The country club part of the resort sits on 36 acres, of which about 25 are grounds. It was built in the early 1960s. The Tower, built across the street several years later, has 25 total acres.

Several of the restaurants are only open for dinner, which makes it tough for hanging baskets to survive long. Russell usually buys 40 plants and rotates 20 each between the restaurant and a greenhouse on the property. He uses dracaena which thrive in low-light conditions.

Most of the turf on the property is St. Augustinegrass. Frequent irrigation can be a problem.

Water is pumped from small circulating ponds in the Japanese Garden in front of the country club.

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## **AS GOOD AS GOLD**

A vast array of gold and gems is sold throughout the Bahamas. Emeralds are the prize.

That made it easy to name the Princess' two golf courses, which stretch a combined seven miles: just call them the Emerald and the Ruby, and maybe they'll play like jewels.

But jewels often need polishing, as new superintendent Shervin Bastian is finding out. Bastian has been in his position just six months, although he's worked on the crew for 10 years. He inherited his position when the former superintendent couldn't get his work permit renewed by the government.

"It's hard, hard work," he says. The hardest part, he

says, is not having an assistant. When he was promoted from assistant to superintendent, no one was immediately promoted to assistant. So his work schedule averages 12 hours a day, usually every day.

But with a crew of 24 year-round, the courses receive the care of a prized gem. And his new title allows him some special privileges. "Before, I'd just go and work. But now, being in charge I get to work with the people who play the course," Bastian says.

While meeting the guests is his favorite part of the job, the traffic is his biggest challenge.

The Princess is the island's largest resort, and though no one seems to keep statistics, the rounds of golf played during the prime winter months is overwhelming.

"It doesn't always look good under all that traffic, but there's nothing you can do about it," Bastian says. "Once we had 177 carts out and that was not enough. Guests had to wait to go back out."

Bastian treats the two par-72 courses the same. The biggest difference between the two is the water. Lakes affect five holes on the Ruby and only two on the Emerald. But, Bastian says, the Emerald has some tougher holes.

The crew rebuilt the greens three years ago, doing one course at a time in the summer off-season. "There

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**Superintendent Shervin Bastian says working with the guests is his favorite part of the job.**



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The water is treated with copper sulfate and Aquashade to control weeds and enhance color.

The front system is somewhat antiquated with heads which must be manually operated. The system at the back of the property is automatic. When the water has been used in back, the pond is too low to draw water for the front.

"The hardest part is keeping the lawn green with all the shade," Russell says. In heavily shaded areas and where weeds are a problem, Russell either clears the bed and lays peat rock or uses a drought-tolerant groundcover, such as wedelia, which grows naturally on the beaches.

The numerous trees on the property range from towering grand old ficuses to lanky palms of every variety, including coconut, royal and the traveler's palm, brought to the island by Christopher Columbus. Even cold climate trees like the podocarpus grow on the property.

It's not uncommon for workers or guests to pick coconuts and drink the juice, or to nibble on exotic fruits like papaya, mango, Japanese plum (loquat) and Barbados cherry. In fact, the Chinese restaurant at the Interna-



The picturesque 13th hole on the Ruby sports native royal palms.

## GOOD AS GOLD

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was a lot of common bermuda in the greens, and that was hard to maintain," Bastian explains. "When you cut low, you'd get a lot of brown spots."

During the summer, Bastian mows greens daily at  $\frac{3}{16}$  of an inch, but raises the height to  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch during the winter, when turf growth slows.

He fertilizes frequently using Milorganite and slow-release sulfur-coated products. Fairways usually receive a 16-4-8 fertilizer.

With four Jacobsen greensmowers, Bastian says the crew can finish the greens on both courses in 75 minutes.

Other major equipment includes two Jacobsen fairway mowers and a Toro Sand Pro sandtrap rake.

The crew mows fairways only once a week in the winter, but every day in the summer. It's important to note, however, that summer in the Bahamas runs from May to December.

During hot, dry summers, the courses are watered

daily. Temperatures in the winter can still get into the 80s, so the courses are watered at least every other day then.

The Princess has its own sewage treatment plant, so the courses are irrigated with effluent water. The manual irrigation system on the Emerald is labor intensive, but the Ruby has pop-up sprinkler heads.

Despite frequent watering, disease is rare on the Bahamian courses. "I haven't seen a case of disease in the 10 years," Bastian says. He credits the former superintendent with knowing how to prevent it.

Bastian's decade of experience has kept the courses in prime shape during the transition. "It's not only experience, but you need an education about turf, too," Bastian says. He plans to take a short course in Florida, where conditions are similar to the islands.

With the right combination of education and experience Bastian will certainly keep Freeport's royal resort courses looking as good as gold.

—Heide Aungst