

# PITCH PERFECT

CONCH SHELLS, COCONUT TREES AND SLEEPING UNDER A CANVAS... LEO BEAR CHARTS ONE MAN'S QUEST TO BUILD THE BAHAMAS' FIRST LUXURY SOLAR-POWERED BEACH CAMP

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Previous spread  
The Other Side is situated on a small secluded beach

This page from left  
The bedrooms have a rustic yet luxurious vibe; Ben Simmons, the man behind The Other Side



On a quiet palm-studded cove on the north shores of Eleuthera island, a chic eco-camp is creating waves. Arrive by car and there's no sign for 'The Other Side'; just two metal prongs mark the turn-off to a bumpy track to the ocean. The perfect antidote to the excesses of neighbouring Harbour Island, this diminutive solar-powered beach camp is as esoteric as it is eco-friendly. To picture the scene, think *Out of Africa* meets *The Blue Lagoon*.

Ben Simmons, the man behind the project, is a charismatic Bahamian, born in Nassau. He grew up chasing waves and racing hermit crabs before a stint at boarding school led him to Ireland. Returning to his beloved Bahamas after graduating, he worked as a chef in his mother's hotel (The Ocean View Club on Harbour Island) while launching his own pop-up catering company. Five years ago, Simmons took hold of the reins of The Ocean View Club, and while gently updating the décor with a more boho style, he put in motion plans for a sister property, something totally stripped back...

The foundations for The Other Side went down just a few weeks before his first son was born. "My great grandfather sailed across the harbour every day to farm in order to feed his family and I like to think I'm following in his footsteps," says Simmons. "We wanted to create an environment that puts our children in close proximity with nature and exposes them to alternative technology." The concepts of 'home' and 'hotel' have always overlapped in his life, each informing the other. Hence, the family home has been built on site and, like The Other Side, it operates completely off the grid.

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Guests checking into the camp are encouraged to make themselves at home too. At its heart lie four communal tents housing a dining room, playroom, library and large-scale honesty bar furnished with a wrought-iron chandelier and enough liquor to sink a pirate ship. The local cooks make everything to order, and sing as they marinate chicken with jerk spices or crack open lobster claws. If you love something one night, you're welcome to ask for it the next, and when it comes to making the most of the paradisiacal surroundings, there are paddle boards, yoga mats and ping-pong bats to help yourselves to. For exploring Eleuthera's blue holes and bountiful beaches, you'll be handed the keys to the camp's Moke, or for a dose of civilisation, the pink sands and posh restaurants of Harbour Island are just seven minutes away by speedboat.



The whole project was entirely self-funded. In order to secure the land – part of a Bahamian reservation – Simmons was required to prove his lineage. “You have to be descended from a group of about 50 men that risked their lives to go and liberate New Providence from the Spanish in 1743,” he explains. “The land is free but if you fail to cultivate or use the land within three years, another descendant can take over the property.” Nothing to worry about there. Simmons has put every inch to good use. A significant portion is allocated to the camp’s impressive vegetable garden and splendidly unruly pumpkin patch. Lining the hill behind is a smattering of wooden cabins built for those who prefer a solid roof over their head at night.

The term ‘glamping’ evokes a certain level of luxury, but the lodgings at The Other Side are in a league of their own. Crafted from bleached hardwood and heavy canvas, each of the three

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jumbo-sized tents are a tumbling distance from the ocean’s edge. Each features a four-poster bed carved from local wood and a living room sprinkled with Victorian antiques, trestle tables and vintage knick-knacks.

One of the biggest challenges came in deciding exactly how rustic yet sophisticated to make them. Nespresso machines or no Nespresso machines? Hairdryers or not. In the end, they decided to go all-out, lavishing the tents with bronze bedside lamps that operate on dimmers, wooden ceiling fans, air-conditioning and WiFi. French doors lead into palatial teak-panelled bathrooms with rainfall showers and bathtubs open to the elements. And, in a nod to the great outdoors, windows and doors are secured with frayed rope.

Beyond the inspired castaway-chic aesthetic, the eco-credentials and the sheer ambition of the endeavour, what impresses most about The Other Side is it’s brilliantly ahead of the curve, fantastically luxurious and fundamentally great fun.

This is the side to The Bahamas you need to see. 📍



#### WHAT IS GLAMPING?

Shorthand for glamorous camping, ‘glamping’ is a form of camping that involves accommodation far superior to that associated with traditional camping. It’s about immersing oneself in nature while enjoying all the comforts of a five-star hotel: fresh-pressed linens, en suite bathrooms and in many cases WiFi. From California’s Big Sur, to eco-domes in Iceland and goatskin tents in Jordan’s Wadi Rum, glamping, in its essence, combines luxury and adventure with the utmost respect for the environment.

Above from left The site does have a few hotel amenities, like the pool; communal tents provide a space for eating

Opposite page The property is comprised of seven tents

