

EXCLUSIVE

The look of fear on Bec Hewitt's face when she leaves the high-security Bahamas mansion she and Lleyton call home is warranted, **ANNETTE WITHERIDGE** discovers

BEC'S

BAHAMAS NIGHTMARE

When her tennis ace husband Lleyton Hewitt announced they were moving to the Bahamas, Bec probably expected to find a sizzling new social life among the rich and famous. If so, she must be sorely disappointed.

To outsiders, the high-security gated community of Old Fort Bay looks like an idyllic place to bring up children. But in reality, the 197-hectare "village" is a gilded cage, surrounded by spiked fences and barbed wire.

Just 25 minutes drive away, locals live in abject poverty in the slums of Nassau, and Bec's neighbours warn that it's a dangerous place blighted by crime, poverty and high unemployment. Armed robberies are commonplace,

and last week a 34-year-old mother of three became the country's 53rd murder victim this year when she was gunned down metres from church. A few days later more people were killed.

'Lleyton couldn't be friendlier but his wife Bec looks so lonely all the time'

With the harsh reality life in the islands now Bec is showing every sign of wanting out.

Lleyton, 28, chose the island of New Providence because he wanted easy access to America's lucrative

BAHAMAS NIGHTMARE

tennis circuit. Old Fort Bay is just a 10-minute drive from the busy international airport.

The contrast between the super wealthy residents, who live behind razor-sharp fences with 24-hour security guards, and the rest of the island's 330,000 inhabitants could not be greater. Burned out shacks, scruffy apartment blocks with smashed windows and graffiti-covered shops abound near the country's capital Nassau. Most visitors don't even go into the city where gun-toting youths and drug addicts are on almost every corner.

The weekend tranquillity of Old Fort Bay is shattered on weekdays by construction noise - the estate is still being developed and eventually the newly built \$3.8 million Hewitt house, which sits in the middle of several vacant lots, will be surrounded by other homes.

Bec, 26, no doubt expected to make friends with young neighbours, but in reality there are few. Aside from pop singer Shakira, who lives on the coast, most of the residents are retired bankers and businessmen.

Adding to her loneliness is the fact that while Lleyton is instantly recognised by the sports crazy locals, no-one has any idea who former *Home And Away* star Bec is.

"Lleyton couldn't be friendlier," gardener Charles Lewitts says. "But his wife looks so lonely. She is always at the playground with her little girl. It's such a shame there aren't any other children here."

Bec's social life could pick up next month when Mia, 3, is expected to start nursery classes at the nearby Lyford Cay International School, which has an active parents and teachers association. ▶▶

THE HEWITTS' HOME



THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

TYPICAL HOUSING



IMPOVERISHED LOCALS



HIGH-SECURITY COMPOUNDS



BARRED WINDOWS



UNKEMPT STREETS



But with eight-month-old baby son Cruz still nursing, Bec is restricted on where she can go.

Lleyton has thrown himself into island living, buying a golf buggy to zip around the estate's tree-lined boulevards. Their pastel yellow house has a swimming pool, barbecue, deep-water dock and pagoda.

Elizabeth Griffin, who runs the nearby Morley For Men clothes shop, says, "I've seen [Bec] around here shopping a few times. She is sweet but she hasn't really got involved with anything locally yet. When you first move here it is hard to make friends, but

you have to throw yourself into the community."

Lleyton has made an effort to get to know people, taking Bec and the kids into Lyford Cay's News Cafe for lunch on several occasions.

"They are a lovely couple. Lleyton is always smiling and chats to everyone," says manager Mike Jones.

The couple splashed out almost \$32,000 each to become members of the exclusive Old Fort Bay Club, which is strictly off-limits to outsiders. They've been spotted enjoying pizza and burgers on the verandah and dining in the more formal



Within their gated community, Bec, Lleyton and their children Mia and Cruz feel quite safe, but the family are faced with an ugly reality when they leave their high-security compound.



'It may look like paradise but Nassau is a very dangerous place. There are nasty ghettos and a big drug problem'

restaurant. The club's biggest asset is the beach, said to be the prettiest on the entire island. There's a small bar and a handful of sun loungers but practically no people around.

There are also tennis courts should Lleyton, currently in America for the US Open, want to show off his skills. But according to local estate agent and Hewitt neighbour Sara Callender, the charm is Old Fort Bay's small size.

"We consider ourselves to be a little waterside community," she says. "Lleyton and Bec are my neighbours, so I don't want to say too much about them except that they seem to have settled in OK."

"This is a lovely area if you want total privacy," says carpenter James Arbor, who has worked on many of the new houses in the area. "But it is not the real Bahamas. Here everyone lives behind gates, CCTV cameras and 24-hour security. If you peer through the foliage you'll see razor wire to keep burglars out. This place

may look like paradise but Nassau is a dangerous place.

"There are some nasty ghettos, there's a big drug problem and violence everywhere. I wouldn't recommend anyone wandering around Nassau at night, or at least people should leave their Rolex watches and diamond necklaces locked up at home.

Security guards constantly patrol the estate and check on the Hewitt house – aptly named Palm Beach after the suburb they lived in while in Australia – when the family is away.

"It's fair to say this is a gilded cage," says one retired Old Fort Bay resident who didn't want to be named. "It might seem odd to outsiders but this is a way of life. I haven't met Lleyton or his wife yet but I'll make a point of introducing myself to them at the club as making them feel at home."

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