

ELLE ESCAPES



ST. BARTS

BY KAYLA WEBLEY ADLER

The French Caribbean island of Saint Barthélemy, or St. Barts (or St. Barths) as it is commonly called, is a playground for the extremely well-heeled—the kind of place Kendall Jenner or Jeff Bezos might jet to for the weekend, and often do. It had long existed in my mind as a luxe dreamland, and after a short charter flight from San Juan, courtesy of [Tradewind Aviation](#), I was excited to find out why the tiny island (it's less than 10 square miles), is such a draw.

By the time I finished my first meal, I had figured out what sets St. Barts apart. Sure, the island has the pristine white sand beaches and brilliant turquoise water that much of the Caribbean is known for, but there's also a huge bonus when it comes to vacationing here: delicious French food *everywhere*, prepared by some of the best chefs in the world. Beautiful beaches *and* fresh-baked croissants? Sign me up.



And if that isn't enough to entice you: St. Barts also throws some truly epic beach parties, and is home to some of the best high-end shopping in the Caribbean (Hermès, Louis Vuitton, and Prada all have outposts there). Read on for the best places to laze the days away.

Shell Beach



St. Barts may be known for its white sand, but dare I say Shell Beach, which, as the name suggests, is covered by shells of many shapes, sizes, and colors, is perhaps even more stunning. And lest you worry that this beach is pretty but painful on the feet, there are plenty of areas where the shells have been crushed down to a fine powder that's perfect for throwing down a towel over. Located on the western side of the island, Shell Beach is also a great spot to watch the sunset; head to [Shellona](#) to nosh on some Greek bites as you soak up the view.

Natural Pools



Everyone knows about St. Barts' beaches, but its lesser-known natural pools are also a must-see. They can be hard to find—tucked behind rocks and below jagged cliffs—and the trails are a bit hard to follow, so it's best to enlist the help of a knowledgeable guide. (Guides also know when the pools are safe to enter—the waves are often too strong; I went with Jean-Edmond Amblard of Essence Wellness St. Barth.) The reasonably short but steep trek, with great vistas, was well worth the reward at the end: a dip in the vibrant waters.

Le Spa



Look, any high-end hotel spa is sure to be amazing, but add in a partnership with the luxury skincare brand La Mer and Le Spa is in a class all of its own, as the only spa in the Caribbean to integrate the famed miracle skin cream into its face and body treatments. While you're there, you can soak in the spa's Nordic-inspired baths (one warm and two cold), which are made of red cedar and smell incredible.



Tamarin



Set in a tropical jungle, eating at Tamarin feels less like dinner and more like an *experience*. If you're lucky, you'll be seated at one of its tables that is so enveloped by the lush surroundings that it's easy to forget there are other diners nearby. Some of the stars of the menu are the tiradito, a Peruvian dish similar to carpaccio, with pickles and ginger sorbet, and the milk-fed veal. If you have any room left, the citrus pavlova and inventive take on a lemon meringue pie are to die for.

Amis



I could eat at Amis for breakfast, lunch, and dinner—and in fact, I did! Featuring French and Mediterranean-inspired dishes, the menu is exactly the kind of light, fresh food you want to be eating when you're by the water, including local ceviche, watermelon-goat cheese salad, spiced beef balls, and carpaccio (both fish and tomato, the latter of which is served with burrata from Puglia). Visitors who aren't staying at the hotel can opt for the "A Day at Amis Plage," which includes an appetizer, main, and dessert, along with a sun bed for the day, for 90 euros. And if you stick around for dinner, you *must* order the lobster ravioli; it comes with carrot and ginger purée and a curry butter sauce that had me literally wanting to lick my plate clean.

Riviera



This is the kind of place that will leave you mystified, thinking, *Are we sure I'm not in Saint-Tropez right now?* A play on the French Riviera, Riviera aims to transport visitors to the equally posh South of France through both the look and feel of its space as well as the cuisine. Chef Arnaud Faye hails from some of the best restaurants in Paris and elsewhere in France, where he received several Michelin stars, before falling in love with St. Barts and bringing his talents to the island. One of the best parts about dining here: the pastry cart, where sweet options abound.



Nikki Beach



If you're looking for a day party—and who isn't?—head to the luxury beach club, Nikki Beach, for an afternoon of beats, swimming, cocktails, sushi, and likely a few celebrity sightings. Snag one of the plush, sparkling white sun beds and, who knows, maybe Beyoncé, Mariah Carey, or Gwen Stefani (all of whom have reportedly blessed Nikki Beach with their presence) will plop down in the next lounge chair over? Don't miss Rosé Fridays and Amazing Sundays, the popular day-long global dance party.

Bar de L'Oubli



This bright bistro, centrally located in Gustavia, is a great spot to wind down after an afternoon of shopping in the island's capital city's many boutiques. Choose from any number of tropical cocktails, from Caribbean classics (daiquiris, mai tais, dark and stormies) to the creative (its namesake features blended strawberries and champagne), and snack on cod fritters and fries. Alternatively, get an early start with mimosas at brunch. Bar de l'Oubli is a favorite for breakfast on the island, just ask the Kardashians and Karlie Kloss, who have reportedly dined there.

Le Ti



St. Barts meets Moulin Rouge at Le Ti, where burlesque dancers put on a cabaret show while you dine. After the meal, the restaurant, set in a Creole cottage up in the hills, turns into a full-on club and, for a small fee, partiers can visit the costume closet to adorn themselves with feathers and sequins. This is your Instagram moment.



Le Barthélemy



On the north end of St. Barts, away from the crowds of Gustavia, lies Le Barthélemy, a luxury hotel located in the middle of the island's Grand Cul de Sac, a quiet, crescent-shaped lagoon known for kitesurfing and sea turtles. Its stylish ocean view suites come with private infinity pools, generous patios, and the largest rain showers I've ever seen. If you really want to treat yourself (and five very lucky BFFs), rent one of the two six-bedroom villas, each equipped with private infinity pools that look out over the bay. And if you can pull yourself away from your setup, the hotel's sizable infinity pool is a sight worth taking in, not to mention the beachfront loungers alongside it are also a great spot to spend an afternoon. (The toughest decision I faced each day was where to park myself!) All that, plus all-you-can-eat pain au chocolat in the morning? I never wanted to leave.

Cheval Blanc



Cheval Blanc is the only hotel in St. Barts to have received the coveted “palace” distinction. The hotel, part of the LVMH’s hotel group, recently underwent a top-to-toe renovation by renowned French interior designer Jacques Grange. The results are grand. A highlight: La Villa de France, a five-bedroom villa with two infinity pools, a private spa, and jaw-dropping views. But perhaps the best part of the property is the gardens surrounding it, designed by Madison Cox, the landscape designer behind Marrakech’s famed Jardin Majorelle, once owned by Yves Saint Laurent. The hotel’s restaurant, La Case, is also a gorgeous space, with porcelain Dior tableware made exclusively for the restaurant. Be sure to order chef Jean Imbert’s specialty: the sand-crusted sea bass.

Rosewood Le Guanahani



Le Guanahani is back! And it has a new name. The beloved mainstay, set on a private peninsula and known for its adorable lavender, yellow, and blue clapboard cottages, was all but destroyed by Hurricane Irma and closed in 2017. After five years of renovations, and now under the leadership of the Rosewood Hotel Group, the resort has reopened and it’s chicer than ever. Now the largest hotel on the island (though you’d never know it from the intimate feel), its 20 suites each have private pools, which very much seems to be a thing in St. Barts.