

# ISLAND HOPPING

Whenever I start thinking about a short – or long –summer stay in the Caribbean, I can almost feel the salty tropical breeze on my skin. My other senses then quickly come into play, with the sound of waves lapping onto sandy beaches, see-through crystal-clear water and the smell and taste of island cuisine all arousing island fever in me. The next thing I know, I've made myself a Mount Gay and cola – and booked a flight and a room.



Quite simply, there's just something about the Caribbean not found anywhere else in the world. However, with dozens of very different upscale islands, experiences, and resorts from which to choose, the Caribbean is most definitely not cookie-cutter when it comes to welcoming luxury-leaning visitors. That's why I'm pretty darned picky when it comes to choosing islands and resorts. Only the best will do, and I obviously have similar tastes with the folks at The Leading Hotels of the World.

We're talking islands with a certain style that 'say' Caribbean without yelling it. In my mind, I

picture my kinds of saintly islands like St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Martin, St. Lucia, and St. Barth. Or, maybe warm memories assault my senses of past stays on Anguilla, Barbados, the Dominican Republic, or Providenciales down in the Turks and Caicos. Pretty soon, these mind games lead to making specific plans for creating new Caribbean memories.

The following descriptions present a trio of my favorite islands, as well as the best places to stay once there – trust me.

# St. Barth: Tres Chic

Elegant and fashionable St. Barth is the French Caribbean at its most chic. Frequenting by the most discriminating visitors, St. Barth was put on the map of high-end tourism by the Rockefellers in the late-1950s and has aged glamorously.

"Discovered" by Christopher Columbus in 1493 and by the jet set some 500 years later, St. Barth is most definitely not a place where one wears his or her wealth on a shirt sleeve – and any sleeves worn on the island are decidedly crumpled versus starched. Whether it's a leisurely afternoon at famed Nikki Beach, shopping for luxury international and local goods in Gustavia or St. Jean, or Saturday night cocktails at Le Ti or the Yacht Club, St. Barth remains irresistible to travelers in search of Caribbean luxury.



Sailing remains a passionate pursuit on the island, and a champagne sail at sunset remains popular for good reason – as do sunset toasts at Do Brazil. I also love the leisurely gourmet dinners at any number of restaurants that would do well in Paris – like L'Isola, Le Bonito, Wall House, Restaurant les Pêcheurs, and Restaurant Indigo. Possibly more so than any other island in the Caribbean, summer is the season when both locals and visitors in-the-know stress even less. The beaches are virtually deserted, restaurant reservations are much easier to make, and cultural events pack the calendar. Though I'll head to St. Barth at the drop of a jaunty sailor's cap, summer has always been a special time for me to be on this special island. The summer calendar carries many possibilities. Bastille Day, July 14th, brings fireworks and dancing on the docks at Quai General de Gaulle in Gustavia. The early August Windward Fete means regattas, a fishing tournament, and more in Lorient. There's also the St. Barth Tennis Open in early August and several live music festivals before the summer season unofficially closes with St. Barthelemy Saint's Day, including official ceremonies, regattas, fireworks, and – yes – more dancing on the docks.



### **Where to Stay**

Set on 16 acres of a peninsula, hotel Guanahani & Spa is another barefoot chic member of The Leading Hotels of the World, with two beaches, large bungalow-style rooms, tennis, a spa, and stunning gardens. Family- owned Le Sereno hotel Villas & Spa is equally impressive and private, with a beach, quiet accommodations with private terraces and gardens, and an intimate spa.

*SHOPPING ST. BARTH... Known as the "Fashion Capital of the Caribbean," retail therapy is painless on St. Barth, and the island is a playground for fashionistas of every type. In Gustavia and St. Jean, the most prestigious international luxury brands and designers literally rub shoulders with young local designers whose collections are inspired by island life. Fashion shows, musical events, informal receptions, memorable parties, and a relaxed lifestyle are all part of St. Barth's shopping ethos. Cour Vendome, 100% Capri and Stephane & Bernard, all in Gustavia, are great places to begin retail therapy per Dr. Barth.*