

Indagare

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St. Barth's: Ten To Know



St. Barth's is an uncommonly delicious destination, where travelers can dine out and shop to their heart's content, and yet experience utterly pristine beaches devoid of civilization. But on an island known for its elite status—and which draws many back repeatedly—one's inaugural trip can feel a bit like an initiation to the cool kids' club.

At just over eight square miles, the volcanic island is a self-governing territory of France. French is the official language (though everyone speaks English), the Euro is the local currency and the majority of staff you'll encounter in the resorts hail from France. The pint-size capital, Gustavia, is located on the island's western side and encircles an often mega yacht-filled harbor. Good—though windy and hilly—roads connect St. Barth's 22 beaches, nearly a hundred restaurants and scores of world-class hotels.

Whether you're honeymooning or taking your kids, St. Barth's won't disappoint. Here are ten things to know when planning your trip there:

1. Getting to St. Barth's in style requires some travel savvy.

Flying through St. Maarten should be avoided at all costs, as it offers the double-downside of passing through the atrocious SXM airport and clearing customs upon return to the US. Far more seamless is flying through Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands; Tradewind Aviation has multiple flights daily to St. Barth's from San Juan and St. Thomas, with easy connections to major airlines plying the East Coast.

2. You must rent a car as soon as you book your hotel.

Though the island is petite, rental cars are a must for properly exploring, eating out and making the most of the fabulous shopping. Cabs are on the pricey side and as there are few, you'll end up spending a lot of time waiting for them. Being an island, the number of rental cars available is finite. Your Indagare Specialist can reserve a car for you as soon as you confirm your trip.

3. ... But keep in mind that driving is not for the faint of heart.

With its narrow, corkscrewing and steep roads, plus fellow drivers distracted by cell phones or that bottle of wine they had with lunch, driving on St. Barth's is an adventure. Selecting a compact vehicle—Mini Coopers or Smart cars are popular choices—can help in navigating the windy lanes.

4. Don't pick your hotel based on its beach.

As opposed to a Riviera Maya or St. Lucia getaway, where flop-and-drops in front of your resort are de rigeur, the point of St. Barth's is to get in your rental car and explore a different beach every day. Yes, this means sacrificing lounge chairs and waterside service, but the upside is that you'll get to experience virgin white-sand stretches with nary a building nor gum wrapper in sight. **St. Jean Beach** is where you go to see and be seen; for a quieter setting, head to untamed **Colombier**, accessible only via a 30-minute hillside hike. We're particularly fond of stunning **Saline** for its raw natural beauty, but know that it's also popular with nudists.



5. ... But if you do, know that the beach with the best hotels is Anse des Flamands.

The beautiful arc of sand known as Flamands beach has turquoise water, a cool lunch scene and moderately rough waves. High rollers should stay at [Isle de France](#), one of the most exquisite properties on the island with a Provençal-chic appeal, whereas budget-minded travelers will opt for design-oriented value option [Taiwana](#).

6. The food is exponentially better than in most of the Caribbean.

Forget about club sandwiches and overcooked fish—the quality of the cuisine here far exceeds what’s served at most beach resorts. Many of the hotel restaurants are helmed by top chefs imported from France, and the sheer breadth of options on the island is outstanding: you can sample celebrity chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten’s gourmet offerings at [On the Rocks](#), Franco-Venezuelan fusion at [Bonito](#) and top-tier Italian fare at [L’Isola](#) in the same day. It really is a foodie’s paradise.

7. The prices are also exponentially higher.

The quality of the food is staggering...as are the prices. Though the price of accommodation provides a good idea of how inflated your restaurant bill will be, first-timers are often shocked. At a top hotel restaurant, you can expect to spend €30 on a cocktail and €70 for an entrée. For a (relatively) less pricey meal, mingle with the locals at casual spots such as [The Hideaway](#) and [Le Sélect](#).

8. Taking sandwiches to the beach requires a competitive edge.

Though we’ve got nothing against a leisurely seaside lunch at [Dō Brazil](#), the day will come in which you’ll want a packed picnic to take to one of St. Barths’ uninhabited beaches (see #5). Beloved by tourists and locals alike, roadside bakery [La Petite Colombe](#) is the obvious choice for a beach-ready ham-and-gruyere baguette...but you’ll need to get up early to guarantee a successful bakery run. Sandwiches are typically sold out by 8am.



The port town of Gustavia as seen from a nearby lighthouse

9. Keep in mind that St. Barth's isn't all spas and shopping.

The 22 beaches on island offer everything from kid-friendly placid bays to wavy waters perfect for surfing (**Toiny** and **Lorient** beaches) and kite-surfing (**Grand Cul de Sac**). Other activities include deep-sea fishing, snorkeling, scuba diving, paddle-boarding, sailing and water-skiing. Anguilla and Saint Martin are also accessible as day trips.

10. Villas can come with full hotel services.

When booking a villa, travelers often weigh the privacy of a home with the support and services of a hotel...but the two don't need to be mutually exclusive. You might already know that top hotels like [Le Sereno](#) and [Eden Rock](#) have multi-room villas on property; particularly enticing is the latter's palatial Villa Rockstar, which sleeps 10 and comes with a recording studio furnished with the mixing desk used to produce John Lennon's *Imagine*. However, fewer are aware that booking a home through Eden Rock Villa Rental's inventory—which features chic homes all over the island—provides concierge services, daily breakfast delivered to your door, and even 24-hour room service from the hotel's two Jean-Georges restaurants. As a temporary villa resident, you'll never have to bring out your credit card when dining on-property, making the villa experience as seamless as staying at the hotel.

– *Marley Lynch on December 15, 2015*