

SIX 2012 TRENDS

THAT ARE HERE TO STAY



Top, left: *B.F.F. Girls Getaway* at Beaches Resorts. Top, right: Poolside at Bluefields Bay Villas in Jamaica.

When *The Affluent Traveler* polled 3,000 readers a few months ago, readers said that above all, they wanted a beach escape. Where? The Caribbean.

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No surprise; a poll taken 15 years ago might have yielded the same results. However, a beach escape to the Caribbean 15 years ago was not the same thing it is today. Like other tourist destinations, this region keeps evolving to satisfy changing tastes. Some ideas/products, like 1980s-era free-form swimming pools, catch on at hundreds of resorts. Others—say, the 1950s notion that swimming pools required high diving boards—turn out to be mere fads.

Which of 2012's trends will define the coming years? We've identified six ideas/products that have been around for years, but it was this year that they changed from luxuries or novelties to necessities—and at every price point.

green hotels

It isn't easy being green, especially if you're an island reliant upon food shipped long distances (a carnal sin to the locavore crowd), resort construction that has changed entire landscapes, fishing,

and energy consumption, what with so much air-conditioning, laundering, etc. However, 2012 witnessed a virtual avalanche of green initiatives, not to mention the use of the keyword "sustainability" on resort websites where it had never been sighted before.

Secret Bay (secretbay.dm), a new eco-resort on Dominica, systematically conserves water and energy, uses local and sustainable materials, does landscaping with native plants, and is seeking "Marine Reserve" status for the bay itself.

Silver Reef (silverreefst Kitts.com), a 62-condo complex in St. Kitts, uses grey water, solar power, and local materials.

Kittitian Hill villa-and-condo resort (kittitianhill.com), which adheres to similar principles, has designed a cafeteria where workers, residents, and guests can eat together, a radical community-empowering initiative for an upscale resort.

The new **Royal Isabela** (royalisabela.com) in Puerto Rico uses gray and rain water for irrigation, native plants for >>

landscaping, and Dark Sky Initiative guidelines. And many resorts worked hard to win Green Globe certification in 2012; the winners, such as **Rosalie Bay** (rosaliebay.com) in Dominica, the **Tryall Club** (tryallclub.com) in Jamaica, and **Myett's Garden Inn Resort** (myettent.com) in the BVI, want you to know it.

The public as well as the private sector saw green in 2012. Jamaican tourism minister Wykeham McNeill urged communities to emulate **Bluefields Bay Villas** (bluefieldsvillas.com), a luxury enclave that protects the environment and the local village. Grenada's tourism minister, Dr. George Vincent, announced, "We are working with the electric company to produce alternative energy in the form of wind. We are encouraging the hotels to do solar energy." Grenada expanded its underwater sculpture garden, too, which lessens the pressure on fragile coral reefs.

Most radically, Trinidadian hotelier Valmiki Kempadoo, declared that, because of global warming, developers should back away from beaches. What? Wouldn't that defeat the allure of the Caribbean? Not necessarily, says Kempadoo. "The climate away from the beaches is much better. We can grow all these amazing tropical fruits and vegetables...offer beautiful hikes, beautiful views, and a beautiful experience." Which brings us to a related trend....

adventures outside the hotel gates

Whereas many vacationers used to spend most (or all) of their time within the reassuring confines of resorts, 2012 was the year more guests went off-campus. And we're not just talking about the occasional sunset cruise or photo op at Dunn's River Falls.

Harlequin Hotels and Resorts markets the new **blu St. Lucia** (harlequinblu.com), as "the ideal base from which to discover the riches of St. Lucia." That's a long way from marketing it as a resort that has everything you could possibly want. **Jungle Bay Resort & Spa** (junglebaydominica.com) in Dominica unveiled an *Island Fitness Boot Camp* package featuring hiking, kayaking, and more. Almost every island has new diving/snorkeling trips, such as **Stuart Cove's Tiger Beach Shark Excursion** on Grand Bahama Island. And the fledgling **Jamaica Swamp Safari Village** beguiles visitors with crocodiles, Jamaican boa constrictors, capuchin monkeys, and other critters they wouldn't meet at swim-up bars.

Cultural explorations are as hot as eco-excursions. St. Kitts' new Amazing Grace Experience Visitors Center explains the transformation of slave-owner John Newton into a composer ("Amazing Grace") and abolitionist. **Kantours** has a new *Rail, Fortress, and Great House Excursion* on that same island. In Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, the Dominican Convent and Church (1510) has been restored and opened, while a Religious Routes Tourism Project in La Vega connects museums and pilgrimage sites. Haiti has undertaken the restoration of historic Jacmel.

wellness

Although mid-market resorts have long imitated the upmarket resorts's spas, in 2012 spa/wellness programs became necessities at every price point. What's more, existing high-end resorts raised the bar with bigger, better wellness amenities. Anguilla's

Anaconda Boutique Hotel (anacaonahotel.com) unveiled a new *Art of Self Care* program. Antigua's **Carlisle Bay** (campbellgrayhotels.com) announced 3- and 7-day *Wellness Escape Weeks* featuring fitness classes, clinics and spa treatments—a radical change from a week of drinking beer all day by the pool. Six hotels improved and expanded Saint Lucia's *Annual Health and Wellness Retreat*—amazingly, on an island that already has one of the most unique destination spas anywhere, **The BodyHoliday, LeSport** (thebodyholiday.com). And this was the year that Bermuda's **Grotto Bay Beach** (grottobay.com) opened a spa in a cave.

In fact, in the April 2012 issue we honed in on *Women Wellness Retreats*, and Jungle Bay Resort & Spa's Nancy Atzenweiler, the resort's guest services/boot camp director, had an interesting point: "People realize that living a healthy life means exercising, staying fit and eating healthy. Not everybody takes their time during their day-to-day life to do this and therefore are looking for a great place during their vacation to 'get started.'"

In a related development, Caribbean spas have, much like North American spas, become virtual outposts of Asia. The *Como Shambhala* wellness center at **Parrot Cay** (comohotels.com) in the Turks and Caicos was among the first to offer an Eastern holistic approach; now, that seems more Caribbean than coconuts. This year Puerto Rico's **St. Regis Bahia Beach Resort** (stregisbahiaibeach.com) initiated a *Bespoke Yoga Retreat*, while Saint Lucia's **Stonefield Estate Resort** (stonefieldresort.com) built a new fitness center with a spacious yoga studio. Barbados' **Sandy Lane** (sandylane.com) encourages guests to "Go Ayurvedic in the Spa" and to "balance the dosha (mind)" with an *Abhyanga Experience*, while **Peter Island Resort & Spa** (peterisland.com/index.php) hires Ayurvedic therapists from India. Pampering? That's still part of the scene, as are organic spa products, but so are "curatives" and "healing."

a culinary destination

In 2012, the last holdouts finally grasped that North Americans hooked on the Iron Chef want adventurous cuisine. Meanwhile, already-sophisticated hotels plunged even deeper into foodie territory.

St. Barts' **Eden Rock** (edenrockhotel.com) formed a partnership agreement with culinary rockstar Jean-Georges Vongerichten, and it's not the only hotel that's promoting its kitchen as much as its beach. St. Barts' **Hotel Le Toiny** (letoiny.com) has no beach at all, but it does have chef Stephane Mazieres, who has made Le Toiny the first **Relais & Chateaux** property in the Caribbean to achieve Grand Chef distinction. Le Toiny has just refurbished its restaurant, Le Gaiac, to better showcase Mazieres.

This summer, the **St. Kitts Marriott Resort and Royal Beach Casino** (marriott.com) hired chef William Stringfellow, veteran of A-list resorts on four continents; Mustique's **Cotton House** (cottonhouserest.com) proudly announced the acquisition of chef Erwin Abella Joven; Dominica's **Calibishie Cove B & B** (calibishiecove.com) hired French chef Gui Alinat; **Mandarin Oriental's Elbow Beach** (mandarinoriental.com/bermuda) on Bermuda grabbed chef Guido Brambilla for its Lido restaurant, and—well, you get the picture; Caribbean chefs have names now. They even have missions: "Food and beverage is a central part of

the **Beach House** (beachhousetci.com) lifestyle,” says chef Eric Vernice of this new resort on Providenciales, Turks and Caicos. “We are creating a whole new way of approaching the way people think about the dining experience.” And he’s got company. Saint Lucia’s **Jade Mountain** (jademountain.com) and **Anse Chastanet** (ansechastanet.com) boast new culinary packages; Royal Isabela in Puerto Rico, Dominica’s Rosalie Bay Resort, and **Jake’s** (jakeshotel.com) and **Round Hill Hotel & Villas** (roundhill.com) in Jamaica have joined the farm-to-table movement. **AMResorts**’ (amresorts.com) all-inclusives offer a new *Sip Savor and See* dining experience.

Speaking of sipping, Saint Lucia’s **Cap Maison** (capmaison.com) and **Ti Kaye Village** (tikaye.com), the BVI’s Peter Island Resort & Spa, and Royston’s restaurant at Bermuda’s **Reefs Hotel** (thereefs.com) inaugurated new wine-oriented meals and/or tastings in 2012. **Island Routes Tours** (islandroutes.com) conducts a *Chocolate Decadence* trip around Saint Lucia, and **Caribbean Culinary Tours** (caribbeanculinarytours.net) runs a 7-day *St. Kitts & Nevis Eco Adventure Vacation* for foodies. Most tellingly, **Karisma** markets new **Seashore Bay Beach Resort** (seashorebaybeachresort.com) in Jamaica as a “gourmet inclusive.” Five years ago, that phrase would have sounded nonsensical.

customized weddings

The *Your Wedding, Your Style* wedding customization service **Sandals Resorts** (sandals.com) rolled out in 2012 and **Breezes Resorts**’ (breezes.com) *Dream Weddings and Honeymoons Collection* options are not flukes. According to Susan Breslow Sardone, author of “Destination Weddings For Dummies” and guide to honeymoons and romantic getaways for about.com, “While the stay-a-week-get-a-free-bare-bones-wedding offers are still around, resorts are piling on the tempting options (aka upsells): elaborate flowers, towering cakes, local bands, and promoting services by celebrity-branded wedding planners.”

Want a bite out of the destination wedding phenomenon? Grab the June 2012 issue, where we highlight the enduring powerhouses in the destination wedding scene, such as **Sandals**, **AMResorts** and **Paradisus** (paradisus.com).

But high-end properties like **Ritz-Carlton** (ritzcarlton.com) and **Four Seasons** (fourseasons.com) resorts have refined their wedding product, too, she observes, “and they’re promoting it like never before.” The catch: “There’s been a pushback/backlash from guests...who either won’t or can’t afford to basically pay for a vacation at a place the bride and groom have chosen.” But even so, “destination weddings have remained in the 15-20 percent vicinity.” She points out that they’re especially popular among “couples who’ve been around the block and are older and wiser.”

Some of those couples spring for island buy-outs, as described in our story about private island resorts (October 2012). Of course, one has to reserve such buy-outs well in advance. “June is still the number one month for weddings, but October threatens to overtake it,” says Sardone. Naturally, “couples are wise to...pick islands below the hurricane zone.”

girlfriend getaways

Weddings are nice, but sometimes girls just want to have fun, and

in 2012 women-only vacations changed from niche products to big business. **Beaches Resorts** (beaches.com) re-launched its *B.F.F. Girls Getaway* package, and **Cotton House, The Somerset on Grace Bay** (thesomerset.com) in the Turks and Caicos, **The Landings St. Lucia** (thelandingsstlucia.com), Antigua’s Carlisle Bay, **El San Juan Resort & Casino** (elsanjuanresort.com), and scores of other resorts rolled out women-only packages. The BodyHoliday, LeSport hosts groups of women year-round.

What about mancations? El San Juan Resort & Casino offers them, and other resorts that feature casinos, golf, good fishing and/or diving can arrange them, but curiously, there are not many pre-designed mancations in the Caribbean region—yet. ●

5 Other Near-trends That Might Catch on in 2013

VILLAS ON HOTEL GROUNDS:

Not only did more hotels build villas (e.g. **LeVillage St-Barth** on St. Barts) in 2012, but **Harlequin Hotels & Resorts’ Buccament Bay** on St. Vincent debuted with 95 villas. Will all resorts start building villas—even all-inclusives like Buccament Bay where people don’t really need kitchens?

WATER PARKS:

The new facilities at **Sirenis Aquagames Punta Cana**, Bermuda’s **Grotto Bay Beach** and Jamaica’s **Sunset Beach Resort Spa & Waterpark** make you wonder if every family-oriented resort will feel compelled to build a water park.

ZIPLINES:

As of today, you can dangle from cables in St. Martin, Puerto Rico, Antigua, the Dominican Republic, St. Thomas, Jamaica, and Saint Lucia (that one even operates after dark). Just 6,993 islands to go.

MEANINGFUL HOTEL RATINGS:

Not only has French St. Martin devised a new, honest ratings system, but the government helps hoteliers seeking higher ratings to make real upgrades. It would be lovely to see more of this in 2013.

CELLPHONE-FREE ZONES:

Elite Island Resorts has declared parts of the beaches at five resorts to be off limits for cellphones. Ahhh....

AIRPORT UPGRADES:

Nassau’s Lynden Pindling International Airport boasts a new arrivals building. St. Vincent will complete Argyle International Airport in late-2013. Maybe other islands will initiate airport make-overs.

OTHER INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS:

Oranjestad, Aruba, is installing a new trolley system. Will 2013 be the year when other cruise ship ports break ground for streetcars? Hmm. That may be an idea whose time has not yet come.

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