



01 The Eden Rock Hotel
 02 The freeform pool at the Christopher
 03 The Christopher's spa with a view
 04 The Greta Garbo suite at Eden Rock

Simplicity and glamour

The island of Saint-Barthélemy welcomes the wealthy of the world to share in its pleasures – as long as they leave their pretensions at home, says Robert La Bua.

Its official name is 'la Collectivité territoriale de Saint-Barthélemy' and it lies in the northeastern Caribbean islands together with Guadeloupe, Martinique and Saint Martin. But, true to the island's culture, such naming formality is as rare here as a three-piece suit, dismissed in favour of the more familiar St Barts, St Bart, St-Barth or Saint-Barth – the latter being the preferred French abbreviation. This is pronounced something akin to 'San Bart' and is the colloquial term used by the locals themselves. And it's best to follow their example; on Saint-Barth, the last thing you want to be is an outsider.

Discrete glamour Saint-Barthélemy keeps company with Saint-Tropez, Biarritz and Megève as a destination for French celebrities and their international counterparts looking for a respite from the spotlight, eagerly handing over a couple of hundred thousand dollars per week for a villa rental to enjoy gorgeous scenery in total privacy while being pampered by a private concierge service. Despite its glamorous reputation though, Saint-Barth is an uncomplicated destination. Little heed is accorded to the abundance of cash and influence swirling around its shores; locals embrace an altogether different lifestyle, one in which

money, power and ego are left in the drawer of a bedside table in favour of egalitarian simplicity. In a place where everyone looks good and lives well, other currencies serve as barometers of wealth – friendliness, intelligence, talent, affability and integrity among them. On Saint-Barth, conceit finds no shelter; to engage in a duel of 'I'm more important than you' in a place where such tactless one-upmanship is superfluous, is to seal one's fate as a social outcast. Better to relax and enjoy a glass of wine amidst the interesting characters living, working, visiting and enjoying the splendid vistas stretching

toward the horizon in every direction.

Saint-Barth abounds in remarkable individuals, almost all fashionably dressed in airy, creaseless linens mysteriously devoid of perspiration, never mind that the linens are Azzedine Alaïa. On a French island, one's attire is expected to be immaculate regardless of its informality.

Getting there is half the adventure

Saint-Barth doesn't exactly roll out the welcome mat for the masses of tourists disgorged from cruise ships on other islands in the region, instead it goes its own way with regard to tourism: exclusive, expensive, extraordinary. The airport acts as a de facto gatekeeper for the lucky few who make their way here. Home to one of the shortest runways in the world, tiny Gustavia Airport is open only to very small planes, during daylight hours, in good weather.

The 747s arriving from Paris touch down at Princess Juliana Airport on the nearby island of Saint-Martin, which serves as Saint-Barth's de facto international gateway, but no such aircraft will ever land on the hyphen of bitumen starting at the base of a hill and ending not far away on a strip of beach. More reliable as transport is the frequent Voyager ferry service, which offers the only evening transfer to Saint-Barth for visitors arriving at Princess Juliana in the late afternoon.

Easy Time

Once already in the family – that is on the island – visitors are welcomed with the gracious hospitality of a favourite aunt who spoils her kin. For an introductory overview of the land, Hélène Bernier, an audacious environmentalist devoted to the preservation of her island's sublime natural beauty through her non-profit organisation, Saint-Barth Essentiel, shares the island's exceptional landscapes with visitors through her tour company, Saint-Barth Easy Time, inevitably leaving them with a deeper

appreciation of the island's innate appeal and the need to safeguard it.

Luxury or high-end luxury?

With high-level luxury as a minimum, the choice of accommodation is based more on location and preferred holiday style than on quality. In Gustavia, Hotel Carl Gustaf is the establishment of choice for shoppers and culinary adventurers seeking proximity to the upscale boutiques and fine restaurants of the capital. The architecture of Hotel Carl Gustaf's colonial-style villas recall a more genteel era, upgraded, of course. The grande dame of Saint-Barth hotels, this is a flawless choice for staying in town.

If coming to see and be seen, the newly revitalised Christopher is the trendiest hotspot on the island. Very mod, very chic, very stunningly set on Pointe Milou on Saint-Barth's northern coast, Christopher sees a parade of bodies beautiful lying by the pool by day and enjoying cocktail

parties by night, with delectable lunches at its daytime restaurant, Mango, in between. At night, Le Taino serves dinner in an open-air, seaside pavilion.

Rooms and suites are urban cool, with polished cement floors and minimalist décor. Christopher is just down the hill from Le Ti, the island's famed cabaret where good times flow as fast as the champagne.

Most private of all properties is Relais & Châteaux member, Le Toiny, a sublime choice for those seeking discretion and seclusion on the island's picturesque Côte Sauvage, Saint-Barth's wild coast. Le Toiny's 15 individual villas each have their own swimming pools, next to which each morning breakfast appears as if by magic. Fine cuisine is a point of pride at Le Toiny, which is home to Le Gaïac, among the best restaurants in the Caribbean. Meanwhile, the luxurious Eden Rock boasts the world famous Chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten.

Repeat visitors already familiar with the lay of the land often choose to rent private villas in their favourite areas. Villas on Saint-Barth, frequently featured in the world's leading architecture and design magazines, are justly famous for their spectacular locations, sumptuous interiors and absolute privacy; for some visitors, these are the three most important aspects of their stay. Villa management company Ici Et Là has a large portfolio of impressive properties, including landmark homes such as Villa Arte and The View, where the name takes one's breath away. In conjunction with Premium IV, the privacy of a villa can be supplemented with personalised services. Vincent Chevalier is 'The Man' at Premium IV who takes care of every visitor need with a single phone call. ●

Le Toiny, www.letoiny.com, Christopher, www.hotelchristopher.com, Hotel Carl Gustaf, www.hotelcarlgustaf.com, Ici Et Là Villa Rentals, www.icietlavillas.com, Premium IV, www.premiumiv.com, Saint-Barth Easy Time, www.stbartheasytime.com, Saint-Barth Essentiel, www.stbarthessentiel.com, Voyager Ferries, www.voy12.com



05



06



07



08

05 The spa at Hotel Carl Gustaf
06 Terrace view at Le Toiny
07 Culinary delights at Hotel Carl Gustaf
08 Ocean views poolside at Premium IV