

Guide to Saint Barthélemy



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Glamorous and luxurious, the beautiful Caribbean island of Saint Barthélemy beckons A-listers and billionaires year after year to its crystal waters and opulent five-star resorts. A collection of mega yachts lingers along its coastline and don't be surprised if you casually see a celebrity passing by.

Because St Barth's is an overseas collective of France, the French influence is in everything from the island's high-end designer boutiques to its impressive dining and vibrant nightlife. So much so, you may wonder if you've traveled to the south of France, only to look at the clock and realize you're in the Eastern time zone.

It's hard not to instantly be charmed by St Barth's breezy island aesthetic, which is defined by its elegance as much as its opulence (and price tags to match).

Here's what to know about visiting Saint Barthélemy.



How do I pronounce it? Is it Saint Barth or Saint Bart?

It is pronounced Saint Bar-teh-leh-mee. The St Barth is how most shorten it, but a lot of Americans - perhaps due to the pronunciation of the full name - write Saint Bart. For what it is worth, the tourism agency goes by Saint Barth Tourisme, so that's what we're going to use here.

When should I go to St Barth?

The buzzing time to be in St Barth is from late November into May. During events like the yacht races, New Year's Eve and Carnival, you'll find the island alive with activity and yachts dotting the shoreline. It's a grand time weatherwise, but a competitive time to get reservations with the A-list society arriving for a little winter sun.

From mid-May to mid-August, visitor numbers drop off. The "secret season" for St Barth is July, when the weather is warm but still pleasant and the crowds have subsided. You'll have plenty of room to enjoy yourself and reservations will be easily available. Things are never "cheap" in St Barth but you will find prices for rooms drop substantially, perhaps in a range that will make a splurge worth it for a few nights if you come from a more modest tax bracket.

Most of the resorts on the island are closed from mid-August until November 1 due to hurricane season.



Left: Runway of Gustaf III airport in Saint Barthélemy. Melissa Yeager/Lonely Planet Right: View from inside the cockpit of a plane landing. Melissa Yeager/Lonely Planet

How do I get to St Barth?

The runway at Gustaf III St Barth airport is only 650 meters (2132ft) long so there are no large commercial flights. Pilots need a special certification to land here because the landing is steep and short.

So you'll need to fly into Sint Maarten or San Juan, Puerto Rico, first – and during daylight hours because most flights cease operation after sunset. If you are connecting from the western part of the US, you may need to plan to spend a night in one of those destinations to make the connection.

Many find San Juan to be the most comfortable option with sleek XXX jets from carrier Tradewinds making the hour flight over to Saint Barth. They have a separate waiting and screening area in the San Juan airport making it a fairly easy connection.

Sint Maarten offers two connections to St Barth – by ferry or by plane. The ferry will take you 45 minutes to get over to the island. The plane (Winn Air) is very small, but (thankfully) the flight is just 15 minutes.

How to get around the island of St Barth

You'll need a car if you plan to leave your resort. Uber isn't a thing here and there are very few taxis. (Fun fact: many of the taxis double as island tour guides.) There's a law that restricts hotels to only providing transportation to and from the airport – so again, if you plan to jump to a few different places on the island, rent a car. There are a few different options available at the airport.

Some hotels have cars for rent as well, so if you just need one for a few hours, check with your resort.



Gustavia, Saint Barthélemy. Renting a car is essential for travelers who plan to leave their resort. Melissa Yeager/Lonely Planet



Clockwise from top left: Seaside dining at Cheval Blanc St-Barth resort. A dish at a restaurant at the resort. Oceanside patio at Le Barthelemy Champagne at Abyss restaurant at Le Barthelemy Hotel & Spa. Photos by Melissa Yeager/Lonely Planet

How long should I stay?

The better question: how long will your budget allow you to stay? Most people come here to relax and unwind, with the typical visitor spending a week enjoying carefree days by the beach or pool and nights exploring its dining scene and nightlife.

You can likely experience the island in a couple of days, so three- to five-day trips are common too.

Tip: If you don't have the budget but still want to see St Barth, consider taking a day trip from neighboring Sint Maarten via ferry.

Things to do in Saint Barth

Most people coming to Saint Barth are looking for a bit of vitamin D, taking in the beauty of its tranquil waters while enjoying a day at the beach. But there are a few other things to throw into your itinerary.



Left: A guide for Absolute Hot Yoga in St Barthélemy leads hikers on the trail to Colombier Beach. Right: Colombier Beach. Photos by Melissa Yeager/Lonely Planet

Hike to Colombier Beach

The only way to reach Colombier Beach is to hike or boat in. If you opt to go on foot, the trail winds along the coast for the 30 minute journey.

If you want to make the hike a bit spicier, opt to take the trail up to the peak. You'll get views of the island as well as the historic Rockefeller estate as you make the climb. Pause to take in the view at the top, then head back down to the beach to cool off and relax. ([Absolute Hot Yoga St Barth](#) leads guided hikes if you'd like someone to show you the way.)



Left: Fabienne Miot jewelry boutique in Gustavia. Right: Designer boutiques. Photos by Melissa Yeager/Lonely Planet

Stroll the boutiques

Walking around Gustavia is a delight, with a mix of distinct local boutique and high-end designers. Window shop or splurge on a local souvenir to take home.

Get a reservation for a memorable meal

It's worth planning your dinner reservations in advance to take advantage of St Barth's great food scene. With the island's connections to France, you may recognize some names from the south of France and Monaco – like La Petite Plage and Beefbar.





Clockwise from top left: Mezze at the Rosewood Le Guanahani St Barth resort. Dessert at Cheval Blanc St-Barth resort A Beefbar place setting. Veal stuffed leeks at Abyss at Le Barthélemy Hotel & Spa. Photos by Melissa Yeager/Lonely Planet

You can also find some local favorites here too. Fish Corner is literally tucked around the corner of the boutiques in Gustavia. It has only a few tables but a meal is worth tracking down.

If you want a "no reservations needed" meal, grab a beer and a cheeseburger at Le Select in Gustavia, which claims to be the inspiration for Jimmy Buffett's famed song "Cheeseburger in Paradise."



Clockwise from top left: Fish Corner restaurant in Gustavia Fish carpaccio at Fish Corner Le Select Snack Bar cheeseburger Le Select is said to have inspired Jimmy Buffett's song "Cheeseburger in Paradise." Photos by Melissa Yeager/Lonely Planet

What should I pack for St Barth?

With people moving from beach to boats to lunch, the atmosphere for dress in the daytime is very casual. You'll spot lots of linen as it serves a dual purpose of style and comfort in the tropical temperatures. Overall, pack loose comfortable clothing and a stylish coverup to move from beach to restaurant with ease.

Dressier outfits come out for dinnertime, but stylish resort wear is quite common in the evening as well.

Though St Barth is very casual, as the designer boutiques peppering downtown Gustavia would indicate, the island is also dripping in quiet luxury. It's definitely a place to sport your finest handbag but this is also a place for discreet wealth, so you may want to save the heavily labeled designer duds for another destination.

Tip: Pack a Type C (Europlug) adapter for the outlets in your hotel.

What language do they speak in St Barth?

French is the primary language but there are English speakers at most businesses as well. You may also hear Creole.

How much money do I need for St Barth?

In short: this is a large-budget destination. Prices reflect the fact that mostly everything has to be imported. In addition, the island does not have a fresh water source, so drinking water is from a combination of its desalination plant and rainwater collection. (A good reminder to be a kind traveler and conserve water where you can.) Expect the five-star resorts to have price tags that match the exclusivity of their properties.





Clockwise from top left: View from a Christopher St. Barth villa A room at Le Barthélemy Hotel & Spa Private pool at Cheval Blanc-St Barth resort The service buttons at Le Barthélemy. Photos by Melissa Yeager/Lonely Planet

The currency used in St Barth is euros, but with a significant amount of visitors coming from the US, dollars are widely accepted as well.

- Lodging at a five-star resort: €760 (US\$886) a night (or more)
- A midrange hotel booked well in advance (plan ahead: there are fewer of these and they book up quickly): €200-400 (US\$233-466)
- Lodging in a five-bedroom villa: €20,000 (US\$23,313) a night (or more)
- Sunbed at a beach club: €60-80 (US\$70-93)
- Latte from Eden To Go: €3.5 (US\$4)
- Cheeseburger at Le Select: €18 (US\$21)
- Glass of Sancerre at most restaurants: €17 (US\$20)

Will I spot a celebrity?

It's possible. The island is well known for being a favorite for many famous people, including Paul McCartney and Beyoncé. But if you do see a celebrity, the phrase "act like you've been there before" might be a good one to keep in mind. The island takes pride in the fact this is a place where celebrities can come and just have a nice vacation without anyone bothering them, so if you take out your phone to snap a photo, you may find yourself offending local etiquette.

Melissa traveled to Saint Barthélemy at invitation of [St Barth Tourisme](#). Lonely Planet does not accept freebies in exchange for positive coverage.