

The New York Times

March 14, 2018
UVM:5,339,669

St. Barts Recovery: Villas and Hotels Reopen After Hurricane Irma

The damage was significant last September, but debris has been removed and businesses, including restaurants, are operating again.



St. Barts. St. Barts Tourism

By Shivani Vora March 14, 2018

The Caribbean island of St. Barts, a commune of France, is making a strong recovery following the damage that it sustained from last summer's Hurricane Irma, according to several hotel owners, restaurant managers and flight charter companies (Hurricane Maria did minimal damage to the island).

St. Barts has a population of around 10,000 people and is roughly 13 square miles in size; its main industry is tourism, according to Nils Dufau, the president of the St. Barts Tourism Committee and a vice president with the local government.

Although the island's airport, Saint Barthelemy Airport, which serves only small commercial and charter aircraft, closed for just a few hours following Irma in September, the hotels didn't fare as well: many of the 28 properties, the majority of which are less than 50 rooms, were damaged and forced to close, and so were more than half of the island's 800 villas. The stores and restaurants in Gustavia, St. Barts main town and capital, were also temporarily shut, and its streets were strewn with rocks and debris from seawater that flooded the downtown.

Today, the island is cleaned up and ready to welcome visitors.

St. Barts' main attractions include its 17 white sand beaches, surfing, snorkeling, diving and boating, and Mr. Dafau said that visitors to the island can enjoy all of these diversions as they did before Irma.

The debris from the storm that littered parts of the island was cleared within a few weeks, he said. "Our streets are immaculate, and Gustavia looks better than it did pre-Irma because we've replanted it with 1,500 trees and plants, which is more than we had before," Mr. Dufau said.

Most of Gustavia's 150 stores were open by Christmas, and all were open by early March.

The dining scene, too, is back: most of the isle's 65 or so restaurants are open, except for those that are part of hotels that remain closed.

[Bonito Saint Barth](#), a popular French and Caribbean restaurant in downtown Gustavia with water views, reopened on March 10 following two months of construction; Irma caused the restaurant's roof to cave in and destroy the bar and most of the furniture, according to the general manager Nicolas Gicquel. The reopening has had a warm reception. "We have been full every day and have many reservations for the next few weeks," Mr. Gicquel said.

And [Nikki Beach Saint Barth](#), a sought-after beach club and restaurant, is reopening on March 30 with a new outdoor sushi bar and rotisserie.

Ashley Lacour, the president of [Sibarth Bespoke Villa Rentals](#), which has a portfolio of 220 villas, said that some of these homes had damage from Irma and had to close, but most have been open for reservations since December. “Some of the impacted villas have been renovated so they’re new,” he said.

Post-hurricane prices for villa rentals remain the same as before the storm — Mr. Lacour said that the average price for a three-bedroom villa in the summer is between \$10,000 and \$20,000 a week. During the island’s peak season from December through February, that price jumps to between \$30,000 and \$40,000.

Unlike villas, hotels, especially luxury beachfront properties, are taking longer to open because many had severe flooding that caused extreme damage; around 15 of the island’s 28 hotels are currently open while the rest are expected to open before the end of the year.

[Hotel Christopher](#), a 42-room upscale property in the residential neighborhood of Pointe Milou, for example, is targeting an October reopening. The general manager Christophe Chauvin said that Irma damaged 70 percent of the hotel. “Our beachfront restaurant was completely destroyed, and the ocean flooded our pool,” he said.

The property had more misfortune after the storm: it underwent an eight million euro renovation and was scheduled to open in early March, but after a fire in its fine dining restaurant, the opening has been delayed. However, Mr. Chauvin said that the hotel’s spa and beachfront restaurant will be open by the end of March. “We can offer some sort of escape to locals and villa renters,” he said.

And [Eden Rock](#), one of the island’s most high-end hotels, has plans to reopen this December, according to the general manger, Fabrice Moizan. “We had mainly water damage from the storm and are in the middle of a big renovation that includes a stronger infrastructure to prevent such a big impact when another hurricane happens,” he said.

Another high-end property, [Hotel Manapany](#), was already closed for a renovation when Irma hit and reopened on March 13 with 43 redesigned rooms and a new pool and spa. The owner Anne Jousse said that the property is nearly full during the [St. Barts Bucket Regatta](#), an internationally known boat race and boat show that’s taking place from March 15 to 18.

Many charters flights to St. Barts are back on their pre-Irma schedules. [Tradewind Aviation](#), which operates between 15 and 30 shared charters a day from San Juan and Antigua to the island, has the same flight schedule as it did this time last year, said the co-owner David Zipkin. He said that business is up in March, compared with last March: the company has 4,000 bookings for the month, a 30 percent jump from 2017.

Mr. Zipkin, who travels to St. Barts frequently, was last there in late February and said that it was as picturesque and alive as ever. “The island is beautifully green, and there are people out and about in the stores and restaurants and on the beaches,” he said.
