

Why St. Barts' Off-Season Is The Island's Best-Kept Secret

Avoid the crowds without breaking the bank.

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Most people think of St. Barts (aka St-Barth, St. Barths, Saint Barthélemy) as a winter playground for the yacht set: high season, high heels, high prices. The island itself is only 9.26 square miles with a population hovering around 10,000. Yet, it punches way above its weight in designer boutiques, fine dining, and gleaming superyachts. That said, in the off-season from April to November, a quieter, more soulful version of the island reveals itself. Picture it: empty beaches, tropical hikes, and rustic bungalows where the only soundtrack is the ocean.

You don't need a trust fund to live out your St. Barts fantasy. I touched down last July, at the heart of low season, when flights and accommodations dip anywhere from 35% to 60% off the winter price, and the roads weren't congested with bumper-to-bumper traffic. With fewer crowds and tropical weather, I wanted to immerse myself in the island's natural beauty on quiet hikes to hidden coves and dips in technicolor tide pools. Basically, I was going for St. Barts, unplugged. And I hoped the trip would reset my stressed-out state, too.

An Iconic Arrival

There are no direct commercial flights from the U.S. to St. Barts, and that's part of the exclusive appeal. The 1% arrive via private jet or yacht, while others (me) embrace the slightly chaotic, not-for-the-faint-of-heart journey. No matter how you get there, the payoff is worth it. First, I flew from New York to St. Maarten, where I sprinted through a confusing maze of customs lines and caught a 15-minute puddle-jumper flight on WinAir.



The landing is the stuff of legends. Your tiny plane soars across clear turquoise waters and over Gustavia harbor, dotted with yachts and the island's signature red rooftops. Then, you white knuckle through a steep descent onto one of the world's shortest runways, wedged between the mountains and a sliver of beach. Local tip: The aerial maneuvers are even more impressive to see from the ground. Pull over on the roads near the airport to watch the planes land and try not to duck.

A Beach (& Pool) Of One's Own

The effortlessly understated Les Ilets de la Plage served as my home base. The low-key, tranquil villas offer two private beaches, a bougainvillea-splashed pool, and an Airbnb price tag (about 360 euros per night). Regulars return year after year, often staying for weeks. My one-bedroom villa, perched in the hillside's lush gardens, had postcard-worthy views of glittering St. Jean Bay and came stocked with tropical fruit, pastries, and juice. A basket of still-warm bread and sweets magically appeared at my doorstep each morning. Often, I was the only person swimming in the pool or sunbathing on the beach — except for the hermit crabs climbing up the dock's wooden steps like they, too, were checking in.

Self-Care Worth Flying For

After hoofing it and splashing all over the island, I carved out time for a different type of wellness: the indulgent, resort-robed kind.



Whether your idea of self-care is poolside yoga followed by a toes-in-the-sand lunch at the eco-friendly and youthful-feeling Hotel Manapany, sipping on a cocktail while taking in the island's most cinematic sunset view at Hotel Christopher's dazzling pool bar, or booking a splurge-worthy La Mer facial steps from the beach at Le Barthélemy (bonus points for the mini-size products as a parting gift), there's something for everyone's R&R style.

Survey The Scene

I came to St. Barts to hike, swim, and decompress. But let's be honest: I didn't come all this way to *not* gawk at the scene-y side of the island.

For a mid-day dose of le vibe, I posted up at Gyp Sea Beach Club, where the rosé flows, the playlist is unmatched, and the food is far better than it needs to be. Come nightfall, there's no more glamorous place to be than celeb-magnet Hotel Eden Rock. The property is built atop a massive rock and is almost surrounded by calm water. Every detail is thoughtfully designed. And you frankly feel chic as hell just sitting at the dinner table. You'll be tempted to people-watch until dawn, but save your nightcap for Le Cafe, a locals-favorite brasserie that morphs into a rollicking piano bar after 10 p.m.

Hike This Way

I mapped my days around coastal treks that led to tidal pools, secluded beaches, and panoramic views that looked straight out of a screensaver.

First up: The Grand Fond Trail, also called the Washing Machine Hike. The path starts from rocky Grand Fond Beach and winds down a cliff. After about 30 minutes, you reach the protected cove locals call the Washing Machine. Continue along the path until you reach the Natural Pools of Grand Fond, where crystal-clear tidal pools are hidden behind maroon and ochre-tinted volcanic rock. Wear shoes with grip and watch your step as you slip into the waist-high water. (Sea urchins love it here, too.) Vibe out and wait for the waves to crash into the rocks behind you. My friends and I had the pools to ourselves the afternoon we went. We ran into one other hiker on our way back.



Colombier Beach is another must. Only accessible by boat or foot, it's one of the island's most secluded stretches of sand and has a killer panoramic view. Choose between two trails, or hike in using one and out with the other. We opted for the easier path, La Petite Anse, which takes about half an hour. The route started with an adorable animal traffic jam: tortoises, roosters, and chickens crowded a watering hole. Be prepared to walk in wild vegetation, through a passage under a cave, and along the edge of a cliff until you descend to the beach. Down on the sand, we shared the bay with just a few picnickers and one boat bobbing in the distance. The water is part of a protected nature reserve, so it's ideal for lazy swims and snorkeling.

On my last morning, I squeezed in the short-but-sweet Guanahani Walk, a 15-minute loop around the peninsula starting from the Rosewood Le Guanahani Hotel in Grand Cul de Sac. The trail hugs the rocky edge of the coastline, offering serene views of the lagoon and Ilet Tortue. When I spotted two turtles gliding between anchored boats, I took it as the island's way of saying goodbye for now.

After a few days in St. Barts, I returned home sporting my best tan in years. The island left me golden: a physical manifestation of the magic of this place. And even after my bronze faded, the island's warm glow stayed with me.