



Come See the Quieter Side of St. Barts

There's more to this Caribbean paradise than parties and beach bars.

By Leila Najafi | December 26, 2024



Le Barthélemy Hotel & Spa

Just because you've already spotted the massive red roof villas and pristine white sand beaches of St. Barts doesn't mean you've made it to paradise. Not quite yet. That's because the island country has one of the world's most dangerous airports. In order to land there, pilots need to maneuver at sharp angles and manage to brake on a runway that's only about 2,100 feet long. But thankfully, it's all uphill from there.

Most people know St. Barts for its posh beach clubs, epic parties, and turquoise blue waters dotted with superyachts. Celebrities regularly brave the treacherous journey for the luxury of being able to both party all night and fly under the radar during the day at exclusive resorts. The idyllic island exudes an understated European sophistication without being ostentatious like other French hotspots (looking at you, Saint-Tropez.)

Many of the establishments in St. Barts were destroyed by Hurricane Irma in 2017, rebuilt, and then quickly shuttered due to the pandemic. But the island has finally risen from the ashes—and it's teeming with charm. St. Barts is known for its vibrant club scene, but its quieter side still feels like an underrated Caribbean secret.

It may be hard to get there, but once you're in St. Barts, you may never want to leave.

Nature and outdoor experiences in St. Barts

Renting a boat in St. Barts is a must in order to get access to some of the most stunning beaches there. Take Colombier Beach, which is quieter and less crowded than St. Jean Beach, where all the beach clubs are located, or Shell Beach near Gustavia. There are only two ways to access Colombier Beach—by boat or by hiking one of two trails. Take a stroll down Colombier Beach Trail, which starts at nearby Flamands Beach. It's 20 minutes long, serves dramatic views throughout, and is the perfect place to catch a Caribbean sunset. The beach is also great for snorkeling or having a relaxing picnic. Meanwhile, see if you can spot David Rockefeller's former villa. Fishing is banned, and the mooring of boats is regulated, so you can expect to catch a glimpse of some sea turtles, stingrays, and multi-colored reef fish. And don't act surprised if you spot topless or partially nude sunbathers: You're in France!

The Grand Fond natural pool is a hidden gem on the island's northeastern shoreline. Booking a local guide is recommended to help navigate this hard-to-find and moderately challenging hike through rocky terrain. You'll start at Grand Fond Beach and hike along the rocky coastline, passing the "Washing Machine"—aptly named for swirling effect caused by waves crashing over the beach—until you come across three turquoise-green natural pools. Take a dip and enjoy this beautiful sliver of heaven to yourself.

St. Barts hotels and other great places to stay

St. Barts is not exactly easy to zip around without a rental car. So the hotel you choose will directly affect the kind of vacation you have there. If you prefer to be in the center of all the action and don't mind dishing out \$2,000 per night (or more) during peak season, the glitzy Eden Rock is the place to be. It's also located next to the island's hottest beach clubs. But there are plenty of options for those who want a quieter, more relaxing escape.

Most of the nightlife and action is centered around Gustavia, so if you're looking for a more chill vacation, check out the fringes of the island. On the eastern side, [Le Barthélemy Hotel & Spa](#) is a quaint 44-room oceanfront resort in Grand Cul-de-Sac that officially opened in 2016 but shut down a couple times due to the one-two punch of Hurricane Irma and then the pandemic. A mere 10-minute drive from the airport, the hotel feels like a friend's cozy California beach house adorned with its coastal decor and muted color scheme. The majority of the rooms boast ocean views—some also have private plunge pools—but if you're traveling with a large group, you'll want to book one of the resort's two six-bedroom beachfront villas, each of which include a 55-foot infinity pool, private butler, and rental car. (Villas are in high demand on the island since most

visitors roll deep, so check out [Le Barth Villa Rentals](#) if they're booked. The company manages more than 200 other properties on the island.)

The hotel overlooks Grand Cul-de-Sac Beach, a calm, reef-protected natural reserve which may as well be private, so snag a lounge chair and get to work on fixing those tanlines. Through the hotel, guests can kayak, snorkel, or plant coral in the bay with David, a seventh-generation native of the island and local surf teacher. Look out for nurse sharks and cute sea turtles that poke their heads out of the shallow lagoon. If the picturesque beach isn't enough to calm your nerves, enjoy the Caribbean's only La Mer spa, which is on site and features cedar Nordic baths, a hammam, and a sauna.

Meanwhile, on the northwestern tip of the island, Cheval Blanc Maison in Flamands Bay is perfect for families or travelers who seek a little privacy. It's called a maison for a reason. Although anyone would feel at home at this barefoot luxury oasis, kids are the real winners here. They can tour gardens, do yoga, and take painting classes while the adults enjoy a little R&R. Rates start at \$750 per night, but expect much higher rates during the winter holidays.

What to know before you go to St. Barts

Best times of the year to visit

Peak season begins around Thanksgiving and runs through April; Christmas through New Years Eve is even busier. It's also harder to get hotel and restaurant reservations during those times. Keep in mind that some hotels book the festive season months in advance.

St. Barts time zone

St. Barts falls under Atlantic Standard Time (GMT-4), which is one hour ahead of New York City's Eastern Standard Time (EST) and four hours ahead of California's Pacific Standard Time (PST).

The weather and climate

St. Barts is part of the Caribbean, so the weather is moderate year-round offering plenty of sunshine and trade-wind breezes. In recent years, the island has become more popular during the summer, too, but expect hot and humid temperatures with a higher chance of rain if you visit during that time. Hurricane season runs from June through late November, and peaks in September. Also

keep in mind that many of the island's hotels and restaurants shut down from mid-August through October.

Languages

St. Barts is a French-Caribbean island and the official language is French, though English is also widely spoken.

How to get around

The best way to get around the island is by renting a car or Moke, which is sort of like a colorful, low-speed Jeep that looks like it belongs to Barbie and Ken. The Moke is the quintessential way to get around Caribbean islands (or most islands), plus it's typically an open-air vehicle and therefore a great way to stay cool. A valid driver's license is required, but you can easily rent them from Barthloc Car Rental or Cool Rental. You can also call an independently owned taxi, but those could easily set you back \$100 dollars each way when crossing the island.

The currency

The official currency in St. Barts is the Euro, although the American Dollar is accepted in some places.

International adapters you'll need

St. Barts uses type E plugs, marked by two round parallel pins. type E.

Standard voltage is 220 V and the frequency is 60 Hz.