

# The Best of St. Maarten/ St. Martin with Anguilla & St. Barts

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**S**t. Maarten/St. Martin and its ritzy neighbors offer pristine beaches with gemlike coral reefs and baubles in duty-free jewelry and couture stores, natural wildlife sightings and nocturnal life on the wild side. You can stay in charming Creole cottages or Moorish-influenced marvels. And of course, you can eat . . . and eat . . . and eat again—at casual beach barbecues and grand temples of gastronomy. Whatever your tastes and budget, in this chapter I'll guide you to the best St. Maarten/St. Martin (as well as Anguilla and St. Barts) have to offer.

## 1 Frommer's Favorite Experiences

- **Going Off Island:** Some of my most memorable moments have been spent off the “mainland.” Take a boat to one of the islands off Orient Bay at St. Martin's east end. There are few more relaxing diversions than sipping a *ti' punch* (a rum aperitif) while wading in a sandbank at Îlet Pinel, St. Martin's green curtain of mountains undulating in the distance, or taking a natural mud bath underneath the cliffs of Tintamarre. See p. 103.
- **Orient Beach:** Hanging out on this 3.2km (2-mile) stretch where everyone else lets it *all* hang out is a must. Activities aplenty exist other than ogling: Most beach bars double as watersports centers and/or chic boutiques. Some even offer massages on the sand. See p. 102.
- **Sidewalk Cafes:** For less obvious but equally enjoyable people-watching, find yourself a prime seat at the Marigot Waterfront or along the Front Street/Great Bay Boardwalk in Philipsburg, where leviathan cruise ships and mega-yachts make the fishing dinghies look like toy boats in a tub.
- **Grand Case:** Over the years this tiny fishing village earned the monikers “Caribbean Restaurant Row” and “Gourmet Capital

of the Caribbean,” and you won’t find such an amazing concentration of top-notch eateries anywhere in the world, let alone the Caribbean. See p. 101.

- **Loterie Farm:** Every time I fret over St. Maarten/St. Martin’s increasing development, I head over to this nature reserve to handle the zip lines or hike through virgin rainforest, followed by a meal at its Hidden Forest Cafe. See p. 93.
- **12-Metre Challenge:** Seasoned sea salts and landlubbers alike will love the experience of racing a genuine America’s Cup yacht. No swabbing required. See p. 105.
- **Kali’s Full Moon Party:** Can you imagine a French frat party? Okay, I can’t either, but this comes close. The pagan ritual is celebrated with terrific jazz and barbecue on delightful Friar’s Bay. See p. 101.
- **Horseback Riding:** You actually swim astride your horse during champagne rides with **Bayside Riding Club** on the French side and **Lucky Stables** on the Dutch side (the latter also offers rugged 2-hr. jaunts down to Cay Bay). See p. 108.
- **Favorite Anguilla Experiences:** **Exploring beaches** is an ever-green delight on an island that resembles one big stretch of glittering sand. And touristy as it is, munching lobster on **Scilly Cay** is also idyllic. See p. 157.
- **Favorite St. Barts Experiences:** Again, anything on the **beaches**, of course. **Sunset cocktails** accompanied by live jazz at the “Goose,” or Carl Gustav hotel, perched high on a hill overlooking Gustavia’s fairy-tale harbor, somehow never gets old. See p. 188 and p. 172.

## 2 The Best Beaches

- **Orient Bay:** This hopping happening strand is clothing-optional. Shed your inhibitions and more, but don’t gawk. Though I love the surreal sight of nude sunbathers snapping shots of passing cruise ships whose passengers are clicking away as well. See p. 102.
- **Baie Longue:** The loveliest, longest, and perhaps most private stretch of sand on St. Martin, and a fine place to spot celebrities staying at La Samanna. See p. 99.
- **Baie de l’Embouchure:** This ecru crescent is encircled (and protected) by a reef, making it a prime family beach. But the steady breezes lure windsurfers too. It’s a great place to glide, and learn. See p. 102.

- **Happy Bay:** It's a short hike to this remarkably pretty, remarkably deserted scimitar of blinding sand where you can act out Robinson Crusoe fantasies. See p. 101.
- **Cupecoy Beach:** My favorite beach on the Dutch side, simply for the gorgeous multihued cliffs pocked with caves, and the occasional green flash sighting at sunset from the aptly named Cliffhanger Bar. See p. 96.
- **Dawn Beach:** Not that I'm up early enough to admire the sunrise here, but the views of St. Barts, great beach bars, excellent windsurfing, and superb snorkeling enchant at any time of day. See p. 98.
- **The Best Beaches on Anguilla:** It's almost impossible to go wrong on Anguilla, but **Shoal Bay** (not to be confused with Shoal Bay West) offers a near-perfect blend of activity and seclusion. I also love the dramatically situated, truly remote **Captain's Bay**. See p. 156.
- **The Best Beaches on St. Barts:** As with Anguilla, where to start? I adore **Anse du Gouverneur**, a perfect cove where I can never decide what's most beautiful: the water, the sunset, the snorkeling, or the bronzed buff bods in the buff . . . **Grande Saline**, practically "next door" on the south coast, is also clothing-optional but family-friendlier, with great swimming and windsurfing conditions. St-Jean and Grand Cul de Sac grab the headlines as the big hotel beaches, but I prefer the quieter **Flamands**, a long ribbon of sand the hue of Cristal champagne and just as apt to make me giddy. Lunch at La Langouste here is a must. See p. 188.

### 3 The Best Places to Get Away from It All

- **Mary's Boon Beach Plantation**, Simpson Bay, St. Maarten (☎ 599/545-7000), might seem like an odd getaway choice, given that its beautiful beach is buzzed a few times daily by jets. But this lovely enclave is peaceful, friendly, and outfitted with every modern necessity when civilization beckons. See p. 54.
- **Le Petit Hotel**, Grand Case, St. Martin (☎ 590/29-09-65), is small and intimate indeed, yet its chic suites are fully equipped. Even though it sits right in the middle of the Grand Case gourmet strip, serenity prevails once you're inside. It gets the nod over its slightly larger, equally sumptuous sister property, Hôtel L'Esplanade Caraïbes, simply for the beachfront setting. See p. 62.

- **Hostellerie des Trois Forces**, Vitet, St. Barts (☎ 590/27-61-25), isn't about cash and cachet: It's a genuinely serene spiritual retreat that lures seers and CEOs, thanks to owner/astrologer Hubert Delamotte (a Gemini). The mountaintop setting, seemingly miles from civilization, makes life's frenzied, frantic, frenetic pace melt away. Rooms are decorated according to each astrological sign's characteristics, and where else could you book past life regression therapy with a gourmet dinner? The billeting and bill of fare live up to the billing for few bills. See p. 178.
- **Manoir de Marie**, Lorient, St. Barts (☎ 590/27-79-27), isn't about cash and cachet either. In its own way, it's about getting back to basics and Nature at timbered cottages nestled in lavish gardens surrounding a genuine 17th-century Norman manor. See p. 180.
- **Salines Garden Cottages**, Grande Saline, St. Barts (☎ 590/51-04-44), is a cozy, comfortable, and arty retreat for romantics and self-sufficient types, just steps from a gorgeous, relatively tranquil beach. See p. 180.

## 4 The Best Luxury Hotels

- **La Samanna**, Baie Longue, St. Martin (☎ 800/854-2252), is stunningly beautiful and, rare among resorts in its class (in both senses of the word), offers posh pampering with nary a hint of pretension. The marvelous restaurant has a new chef but the *corps de cuisine* has remained the same for years, ensuring a graceful transition. The wine list comprising more than 410 entries and 10,000 bottles (the private house label is made by Burgundy's legendary Hospice de Beaune), will make oenophiles sing. See p. 61.
- **Cap Juluca**, Maundays Bay, Anguilla (☎ 888/858-8822), is one of two Anguillian resorts that always takes my breath away. The Moroccan-themed posh pasha digs, the marvelous grounds, the superlative restaurants, and professional yet discreet service explain why it's a favorite of celebrities and titled Europeans. But regular folks receive the royal treatment, too. See p. 143.
- **Malliouhana**, Mead's Bay, Anguilla (☎ 800/835-0796), is my other "if luxe could kill" option. The look and ambience are very different from Cap Juluca (perhaps reflecting the British management) but just as sybaritic. I adore the twin beaches,

gorgeous landscaping, sublime food, lovely spa, stylish rooms, caring service, and owner Leon Roydon's collecting passions on display: Haitian art and arguably the Caribbean's finest wine cellar. See p. 146.

- **Eden Rock**, Baie de St-Jean, St. Barts (☎ 877/563-7105), defines the old hotel mantra "location, location, location," its exquisite lodgings crowning or staggered on either side of the titular bluff that cleaves the bay, forming two perfect beaches. But delightful owners David and Jane Matthews never rest on their laurels, constantly improving one of the Caribbean's most elegant enclaves, where you'll be chic-by-jowl with perennial "Most Beautiful" and "Best Dressed" contenders. See p. 172.

## 5 The Best Restaurants

- **Temptation**, Cupecoy, St. Maarten (☎ 599/545-2254), lives up to its admittedly silly if appropriate name with the island's most creative fare, not to mention an incredibly hip space. I have yet to experience a bad dish, let alone a poor meal. See p. 71.
- **Rare**, Cupecoy, St. Maarten (☎ 599/545-5714), is the other brainchild of Temptation's wunderkind chef/owner, Dino Jagtiani. Aside from the witty decor and winning beef selection, his delightful side dishes are as "puckishly" inventive as anything devised by Wolfgang. See p. 71.
- **Le Gaïac**, Grand Case, St. Martin (☎ 590/51-97-66), feels its "hautes" a bit too often, but I can take a little pretension to savor foie gras this exceptional. See p. 77.
- **L'Hibiscus**, Grand Case, St. Martin (☎ 590/29-17-91), is tiny and on the "wrong side" of Grand Case Boulevard, so it gets overlooked. But not by savvy locals, including rival restaurateurs, who appreciate the marvelous blend of classic French and Creole fare. See p. 82.
- **Spiga**, Grand Case, St. Martin (☎ 590/52-47-83), proves that Grand Case (and St. Martin) can *capisce* and cook Italian with equal panache. From tuna carpaccio to tiramisu, everything is perfection. See p. 85.
- **Lolos**, St. Martin/St. Maarten, is a term for the very basic shacks dishing out heaping helpings of heavenly Creole fare at more than fair prices. The biggest concentration lies along the beach in Grand Case. See p. 83.
- **Malliouhana**, Anguilla (☎ 264/497-6111), exemplifies why this tiny, scrubby British island rivals the best of the French

West Indies in the dining department. The stellar French menu is personally supervised by two-star Michelin toque, Jo Rostang. The beachfront setting is simple yet stylish and the wine selection unparalleled. See p. 146.

- **Blanchards**, Anguilla (☎ 264/497-6100), ranks high on my list of near-perfect beachfront eateries. Owners Bob and Melinda Blanchard have become celebrities themselves, thanks to their witty books about the joys and perils of running a Caribbean restaurant. Fortunately you'll experience only the highs. See p. 151.
- **Hibernia**, Anguilla (☎ 264/497-4290), is an out-of-the-way gem whose owners brilliantly incorporate ingredients and techniques from their Asian travels into their exquisitely prepared and presented French fare. Their wanderings also inform the soothing, smart decor and adjacent gallery (a must-browse between courses). See p. 152.
- **Le Gaïac**, Anse de Toiny, St. Barts (☎ 590/27-88-88), in the ultra-plush Le Toiny hotel, may be the last bastion (or last gasp) of formal French dining on St. Barts. The ambience is swooningly romantic at dinner and the food sublime any time, but it's really a must for its extravagant (in both senses) Sunday brunches. See p. 188.
- **Le Sapotillier**, Gustavia, St. Barts (☎ 590/27-60-28), is my "default" reliably impressive dining experience. Charismatic owner Adam Rajner ensures that the food, service, and ambience are impeccable. And they always are. See p. 183.
- **Wall House**, Gustavia, St. Barts (☎ 590/27-71-83), lacks the sheer fanciness or even stellar people-watching of other St. Barts *boîtes*, but oh how it compensates with harbor-side setting, bonhomie, sensational grilled items, and prices (can't beat the special menus). See p. 183.

## 6 The Best Shopping

- **Front Street** in Philipsburg is simply an eye-popping, mind-boggling display of rampant consumerism. And it's all duty-free, from diamonds to Delft china. See p. 112.
- **Le West Indies Mall** and **Plaza Caraïbes** in Marigot feature the hauteest of couture, well, at any rate prettily priced *prêt-à-porter* and accessories from such design legends as Cartier and Hermès. See p. 113.

- **Artists' ateliers** on the French side are particularly notable, showcasing Gallic expats working in a variety of media and traditions. Many open their studios to visitors, offering a wonderful insight into the creative process. See chapter 6.
- **Ma Doudou**, Cul de Sac, St. Martin (☎ 590/87-30-43), offers a series of delectable infused, charmingly bottled rums, which for my money (or yours) beats the more famous Guavaberry liqueurs for flavor. See p. 122.
- **La Ligne St. Barth**, Lorient, St. Barts (☎ 590/27-82-63), produces skin care, scents, and cosmetic products creatively crafted from Caribbean ingredients. The appetizing aroma in the traditional Creole cottage/factory surpasses that at many a restaurant. See p. 191.
- **Made in St-Barth**, St-Jean, St. Barts (☎ 590/27-56-57), is a fine source for local artworks and crafts, including superb intricate straw-work, as well as locally made essential oils and infused rums. See p. 192.

## 7 The Best Nightlife

- **Bamboo Bernie's**, St. Maarten (☎ 599/545-3622), is a sushi bar. No, it's a tiki bar. No, it's a grade-A meat market with preening pretties aplenty emerging from nooks and niches with that freshly ravaged look. Well, it's a pleasure palace, with fishbowl drinks, swimsuit competitions, even a climbing wall and movie screenings in its Kuta Beach "nightclub" section: something for almost everyone. See p. 127.
- **Bliss**, St. Maarten (☎ 599/545-3936), sounds like a spa, but it's actually Bernie's equally sizzling neighbor, another multi-purpose, hedonistic beachfront nightclub-cum-restaurant-cum-live-music-venue. See p. 124
- **Casino Royale**, St. Maarten (☎ 599/524-0071), is the island's largest and glitziest casino, but really gets the nod over its competitors for its Vegas-style showroom and upstairs high-tech disco throwback, **Q-Club**.
- **Celine**, St. Maarten (☎ 599/545-3961), and her skipper/builder, Neil Roebert offer a unique experience. Among the many definitions in my dictionary, the crawl is a high-speed over-arm swim stroke and a leisurely journey between spots. Your head might be swimming after Celine's Lagoon Pub Crawl, sailing to three Simpson Bay hot spots for drinks and yummy apps. Sea legs optional. See p. 105.

- **Sunset Beach Bar**, St. Maarten (☎ 599/545-3998), on the same beach as Bernie's and Bliss, is one of those places you either love or hate but it's a "must" experience. A dive in the best or worst sense of the word, you come here for live shows, dirty dancing, heavy drinking—and watching the planes take off and land right above your head. See p. 128.
- **Cheri's Café**, St. Maarten (☎ 599/545-3361), is one of those institutions that manages to avoid becoming a cliché or a tourist trap: good relatively inexpensive food, congenial crowd, and fun entertainment. See p. 130.
- **StarBar**, St. Martin (☎ 590/29-65-22), is the most sybaritic chichi club on the French side, which isn't as noted for its partying. But leaving StarBar out would be a nocturnal omission indeed, especially Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays (fab live acts, dizzying DJ spins, and wild costumes). See p. 126.
- **Johnno's Beach Stop**, Sandy Ground, Anguilla (☎ 264/497-2728), is another enduringly popular haunt that draws everyone from locals to Hollywood elite for great barbecue and live music on the beach. See p. 161.
- **Dune Preserve**, Rendezvous Bay, Anguilla (☎ 264/497-2660), opens irregularly, but it's jammed and jamming whenever its owner, Anguilla's best-known singer, "Bankie" Banx performs. See p. 162.
- **Nikki Beach**, Baie de St-Jean, St. Barts (☎ 590/27-64-64), may be that chain's most absurdly decadent, debauched exclusive outpost. The A-list makes a beeline here to spray each other with champagne and canoodle in canopied four-poster beds on the sand, the paparazzi's popping bulbs (and everyone else's popping eyes) be damned. See p. 193.
- **Le Ti St. Barth**, Pointe Milou, St. Barts (☎ 590/27-97-71), serves up uneven but often scrumptious food in a sensuous torchlit setting that lures the merely wealthy and beautiful for sizzling theme nights. Fortunately eye candy doesn't have calories. See p. 187.