

Chapter 15

St. Lucia

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Avocado-shaped St. Lucia (pronounced *loo-shuh*) is one of the beauty spots of the Caribbean, with some of the region's greatest resorts, most of them all-inclusive. Except for a heavy concentration of hotels in the northwest, most of the island is a nature lover's paradise, containing — among other wonders — the world's only drive-through volcano on Mount Soufrière, a 7,689-hectare (19,000-acre) rain forest reserve with prehistoric-looking giant ferns and wild orchids. Other attractions include a waterfall that tumbles in six stages through sulfur springs, and some of the Caribbean's most beautiful natural harbors such as Marigot, a former hideout for the most bloodthirsty pirates in the West Indies in days of yore.

In spite of all this natural grandeur, its capital, Castries, ravaged by fires in 1948 and 1951, is one of the duller in the Caribbean — but that's not why you come to St. Lucia.

Lying between French Martinique and St. Vincent, this mountainous island consists of some 623 sq. km (243 sq. miles), with an estimated 120,000 inhabitants. Just 32km (20 miles) from Martinique, St. Lucia spent a good part of its history bouncing back and forth between France and Britain.

The picture postcard of St. Lucia is most often its twin peaks of the Pitons, soaring 0.8km (a half-mile) out into the Caribbean Sea. These are actually volcanic cones, with Petit Piton to the west and Gros Piton to the immediate east. Actually, the highest point on the island is Mount Gimie at 958m (3,145 feet), rising out of the center of the southern part of the island, with Soufrière and the Pitons to its immediate west.

Arriving at the Airport

St. Lucia has two airports. The modern **Hewanorra International Airport** (☎ 758-454-6355), which lies in the South, is located 72km (45 miles) from the capital of Castries. If you're flying in from most international destinations, such as the United States, chances are you'll land at this well-run and up-to-date airport with modern facilities. Here you'll find ATMs, clean restrooms, a branch of the tourist office (☎ 758-454-6644), and available transportation waiting outside.

The other, more-antiquated airport, **George F.L. Charles** (☎ 758-452-1156), is also called Vigie Airport. It receives smaller craft and lies in the Northeast just outside Castries. It, too, has ATMs, restrooms, and a small tourist office (☎ 758-452-2596).

Navigating your way through passport control and Customs

Unless you look like a very suspicious character — read that, potential drug dealer — you should breeze through Customs relatively easily. Today, St. Lucia is virtually dependent on tourism, and the government instructs Customs officials to ease your entry onto the island with a minimum of difficulty. Officials check to see that you have an ongoing or return ticket, which you should have ready — along with a valid passport — as you wait in line. U.S. citizens can prove citizenship by presenting a birth certificate with a raised seal or else a government-issued photo I.D. Chances are your luggage won't be inspected, but you can never be sure about that.

Getting from the airport to your hotel

Most likely, you'll land at Hewanorra Airport, lying at Vieux Fort at the southern tip of the island and a good distance from your resort, which will probably be on the Northwest Coast unless you're staying at **Anse Chastanet** (see our recommendation later in this chapter).

Chances are you'll have to spend about an hour and a half going along the potholed East Coast Highway to reach your final destination. Between Hewanorra and the resorts north of Castries, the average taxi fare ranges from \$70 to \$75 per carload. If you're booked at a resort along the Southwest Coast, including Soufrière, the average fare ranges from \$55 to \$60 per carload. The ride to a resort around Soufrière takes about an hour. Some resorts will send a shuttle bus to pick you up from the airport; ask about this option when you make your reservation.



Always ask the taxi driver to quote the fare before you get in. Make sure you determine which dollars he or she is quoting — U.S. or the Eastern Caribbean dollar, which is worth about 37¢ in American currency.

Although you may be tired after a long plane ride, you're at least rewarded with a panoramic coastline as you make your way from the southern tip of the island to the north end. Your taxi will traverse lush rain forests and oceanviews before you arrive at the hotel of your choice.

The commute is much easier from George F.L. Charles Airport (Vigie). Depending on your resort, you may be no more than 12 to 25 minutes away if you're lodging in and around Castries. From Vigie, it takes about half an hour to go to a resort at Marigot but a full 1½ hours to reach Soufrière in the South. Expect to spend \$15 to \$20 per taxi ride for a resort on the periphery of Castries but between \$70 and \$75 if you're booked around Soufrière, including Anse Chastanet.

Choosing Your Location

Where you stay in St. Lucia largely determines the quality of your vacation, because getting from one point to another on this mountainous island with its bad roads isn't easy.

Northwest Coast

All the beaches along the Northwest Coast are good for swimming, which is why most resort hotels have located here. The heaviest concentration of hotels is between Castries and Cap Estate in the North. The major attraction on the coast is **Vigie Beach**, a strip of white sand that stretches for 3km (2 miles). This beach begins near Vigie Airport and extends itself to **Choc Beach** and **Reduit Beach** before circling around Rodney Bay to **Pigeon Point**, the latter a small beach with a National Historic Park. Although the beaches are great, patrons of North Coast resorts are also removed from the great scenic wonders that lie in the Southwest.

If your main desire, other than lying on a beach, is to see some of the most spectacular natural wonders in the southern Caribbean, you'd do better to book a room at a resort in the southern city of Soufrière. A northwest location, however, affords you a better opportunity to travel into the capital for shopping (not sightseeing).

Getting around the Northwest, either by car or taxi, is easy because the roads here are flat and straight. If you're serious about boating, **Rodney Bay**, one of the premier yachting centers of the southern Caribbean and the goal of the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers (a transatlantic yacht crossing staged every December), is just a 15-minute drive north of Castries.

Marigot Bay

Marigot Bay gets our vote for the most beautiful natural harbor in the Caribbean. On the Western Coast of St. Lucia, a 13km (8-mile) drive south of Castries, Marigot Bay is known by the yachting crowd around the world who come here for its spectacular anchorage along a palm-fringed shoreline.

This harbor isn't a hotel district like the Northwest Coast or Soufrière, but you can find lodgings here if you deliberately seek seclusion and don't demand to be at the scene of the action. The calm waters and good swimming attract visitors to Marigot Beach. But if you're a true beach buff, you may seek more-expansive sands along the Northwest Coast.

However, if you'll happily settle for swimming, snorkeling, and hobnobbing with the yachties at the local bars, Marigot Bay is one of the snuggest and most romantic nests in the Caribbean. You have to drive or take a taxi for shopping at Castries or for seeing the wonders of nature at Soufrière.

Soufrière

For the sheer drama of nature, we always prefer to anchor in or around the little fishing port of **Soufrière** along the Southwest Coast. Dominated by Gros Piton and Petit Piton (the picture-postcard twin volcanic peaks), Soufrière is the second-largest town in St. Lucia outside of Castries. You'll find beaches here, and good ones, but the real reason to lodge here is to enjoy the French colonial-style town of Soufrière itself (which is a lot more interesting than Castries) and to experience the drive-in volcano, the rain forest, working banana plantations, and botanical gardens that evoke the South Pacific. **Anse Chastanet** (see our recommendation later in this chapter) is also the premier dive resort of St. Lucia. **Jalousie Hilton Resort & Spa** and **Ladera Resort** are the island's pockets of posh if you want to live in supreme luxury. These resorts are far more appealing to us than all those Sandals bedroom factories that dominate St. Lucia today.

Getting Around St. Lucia

Because of its mountainous terrain, St. Lucia is often hard to navigate. But locals have set up a fairly elaborate (at least for the Caribbean) system of hauling you about.

By taxi

By far, your local cabbie is the most popular and convenient means of transport, and prices are fairly reasonable except for the long hauls from one end of the island to the other (say, from the airport to your resort).

Taxis greet arriving planes at both airports, and these cabs also await prospective passengers outside all the major resorts. Taxis aren't metered, but the government regulates fares. Some typical fares are as follows: from Castries to Marigot Bay in the South, \$25 to \$30; from Castries to Rodney Bay in the North, \$18 to \$20; from Castries to Soufrière in the South — a long haul, \$70.

Before getting in a cab, agree on the fare with the driver and, as we advise earlier in this chapter, determine if the quotation is in Eastern Caribbean or U.S. dollars. Because both currencies are in common use on the island, the taxi drivers will easily convert the rate for you.

Because most cabs are independently owned and operated, they don't have a central number for you to call. Your hotel can call a cabbie for you, though.

You can also arrange day tours of the island with a taxi driver, costing \$135 per carload. Usually four passengers are recommended for maximum comfort. Most often, you coordinate these tours through the reception desk at your hotel. Your other option is to call **Toucan Travel**, The Marina (☎ **758-452-9963**), in Castries.

By car

All car-rental companies require drivers to be at least 25 years old and have a valid credit card. If you're a timid driver, use public transportation instead, because the winding, potholed roads are difficult for the faint of heart.

The most spectacular drive is from Castries in the North to Soufrière in the South, but the road is winding and difficult. You have to keep your eyes glued to the highway so much that you won't be able to appreciate the panoramic scenery passing in review. Gasoline is also expensive, about \$3 a gallon.



Local policemen seem adept at giving out tickets, especially for those not obeying island speed limits. For example, in Castries you have to creep along at 48km/h (30mph). That's the bad news. The good news is that there aren't many policemen.

Several U.S. agencies such as Budget, Hertz, and Avis have franchises on the island; Avis and Hertz each have kiosks at both airports. They generally offer an unlimited mileage deal. Arrange car rentals at these U.S. agencies (or any local agency) before leaving home — you'll get a better rate and a guarantee of a car, which may be in limited supply during the winter season. Prices, of course, depend on your vehicle selection but range from \$50 to \$85 a day, or \$250 to \$400 per week.

If you arrive on the island without a reservation and decide to be adventurous and explore on your own, you can also call one of the local car-rental agencies, whose rates are competitive with the U.S. giants.

Here's how to contact the agencies:

- ✓ **Avis** (☎ **800-331-1212**, 758-452-2046; www.avis.com) has the most outlets — at both airports, at Vide Bouteille in Castries, and at Rodney Bay.
- ✓ **Hertz** (☎ **758-654-3001**, 758-454-9636; www.hertz.com) is also located at both airports and in Castries.
- ✓ **Budget** (☎ **758-452-0233**; www.budget.com) has a desk at the Hewanorra Airport and in Castries.

- ✓ **C.T.I. Rent-a-Car**, Grosilet Highway, Rodney Bay Marina (☎ 758-452-0732), is a good bet if you're staying at one of the resorts north of Castries.
- ✓ **Cool Breeze Car Rental**, New Development, Soufrière (☎ 758-459-7729), is a good choice if you're staying in the South and want a local car-rental firm.

The government requires that you obtain a local driver's license, which costs \$21. You can purchase a license either at the airport when you arrive or when you go to pick up your rental car.



Remember to drive on the left, and try to avoid some of the island's more gaping potholes. In St. Lucia, drive more carefully and be more alert than you usually are because of the difficult terrain, and honk your horn every time you go around a blind hairpin turn in the road.

By ferry

Rodney Bay Ferry (☎ 758-452-8816) is a useful way of getting around for visitors to the Northeast Coast. The ferry makes hourly trips daily from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., costing \$4 per person round-trip for sails between the Rodney Bay Marina and the shopping complex at Port Castries. The same company also operates a ferry service from Rodney Bay to Pigeon Island, costing \$50 round-trip, including entrance to this national park. You can also rent equipment for a snorkeling jaunt, which costs \$12.

By island shuttle



The island system of bus transport is a series of privately operated minivans and jitneys painted with such colorful names as "Heartbreaker" and "Amour Lucian Style." These shuttles link Castries in the North with such southern outposts as Soufrière or Vieux Fort. Fares are very cheap — \$2.60 from Castries to Soufrière, for example — but the shuttles are uncomfortable and overcrowded, often filled with passengers carrying produce to the market. The minivans are used mainly by low-income islanders as their only mode of transport for getting around St. Lucia; only the most adventurous foreign visitors ride them.

If you're going on the long haul between Castries and Vieux Fort at the southern tip of the island, the trip takes at least two hours. You can hail these jitneys along the road, or else you can wait for one at a marked bus stop. In Castries, the main point of departure is at the corner of Bridge and Micoud streets.

By helicopter

The fastest mode of transport on this island is via helicopter, preferred by such visitors as Harrison Ford. **St. Lucia Helicopters** (☎ 758-453-6950; www.stluciahelicopters.com) is the quickest way to go between Castries and the Hewanorra airport or Soufrière, costing \$100 per person

one way. You can also arrange flights to **Jalousie Hilton Resort & Spa** (see our recommendation later in this chapter), which has its own helicopter pad. Or, you can fly over St. Lucia on scenic tours (see “Guided tours,” later in this chapter).

Staying in Style

St. Lucia has even better and far more dramatically located all-inclusive resorts than Jamaica, its major competitor in the field. Regrettably, these “everything-included” resorts are a bit pricey (for details on how to save on accommodations, refer to Chapter 6).

Nearly all the hotels and resorts in St. Lucia, even the smaller inns, lie on the western side of the island, which is the more-tranquil Caribbean Sea as opposed to the Atlantic Coast in the East. Most of the resorts lie between Castries (the capital) and Cap Estate in the North. Others are found around Marigot Bay a few miles south of Castries, and a select few are at Soufrière on the Southwestern Coast. Nearly all the accommodations open onto St. Lucia’s unspoiled beaches. Because the West Coast resorts are so spread out, you’re likely to feel rather isolated when you reach your destination. For many visitors, this seclusion is exactly what they’ve come to find.

The Top Resorts

The rack rates listed in this section are in U.S. dollars and are for a standard double room during high season (mid-December to mid-April) unless otherwise noted. Lower rates are available during spring, summer, and autumn.

Anse Chastanet \$\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$\$ Soufrière

This isolated 73-room inn is the premier scuba-diving resort of St. Lucia. It lies 29km (18 miles) north of Hewanorra Airport (a 50-minute taxi ride) and 3km (2 miles) north of the town of Soufrière. Perched on a landscaped hill site, the inn is a 103-step climb above the idyllic and palm-fringed Anse Chastanet Beach. Architect Nick Troubetzkoy created a lush garden on this 242-hectare (600-acre) site, which also contains a second beach, Anse Mamim, reached by the resort’s water taxi. All this is set against the dramatic backdrop of the Pitons.

If you want to be right at the water’s edge, ask for one of the dozen or so beach-level units. The original rooms are perched on the hill, some in an octagonal-shaped gazebo in a white-washed cottage. Views from the rooms are of the gardens, the sea, or the Pitons. The rooms, under beamed or frescoed ceilings, are cooled by ceiling fans or sea trade winds; furnishings throughout the resort are made from local woods. In the spring of

2004, the hotel added two dozen deluxe suites that are among the finest places to stay on the island. The suites are spacious, each with one wall absent and opening onto a private pool. The food in the resort's two restaurants is among the best on the island, and the chefs use local ingredients whenever possible. The beachside restaurant, **Trou au Diable**, attracts nonguests with its grill and West Indian cuisine, plus its twice-weekly Creole dinner buffet.

The water-sports center here is the island's finest, attracting divers from around the world. Other facilities include tennis courts, a small spa and gym, and sailboat rentals.

See map p. 379. *Anse Chastanet Beach, Soufrière.* ☎ **800-223-1108, 758-459-7000.** Fax: 758-459-7700. www.ansechastanet.com. Rack rates: \$445–\$795 double; from \$795 suite. AE, MC, V.



Bay Gardens Hotel

\$\$ Rodney Bay

Lying 4.5km (2¾ miles) north of Castries and Vigie Airport, Bay Gardens opens onto one of the most popular yachting harbors in the Caribbean. The 79-room hotel lies a five-minute walk (or a two-minute shuttle ride) away from Reduit Beach, one of the island's best. The property looks fresh and new and is well maintained; standard doubles, a few studios, and some more-luxurious suites are spread out in four different wings. Families may want to consider one of the eight apartments, each a self-contained unit with a kitchenette. Accommodations open onto a private terrace or balcony, and each room is furnished in a breezy tropical style. Although it can't compete with the facilities of the megaresorts, the hotel offers a restaurant with two bars, two freshwater pools (and a children's pool), a wade pool, twice-weekly entertainment, and an array of Caribbean buffets, barbecues, and rum-punch parties. Kids adore the on-site ice-cream shop.

See map p. 379. *Rodney Bay.* ☎ **877-434-1212, 758-452-8060.** Fax: 758-052-8059. www.baygardenshotel.com. Rack rates: \$95–\$100 standard double; \$110–\$115 studio; \$115–\$150 suites and apts. AE, MC, V.

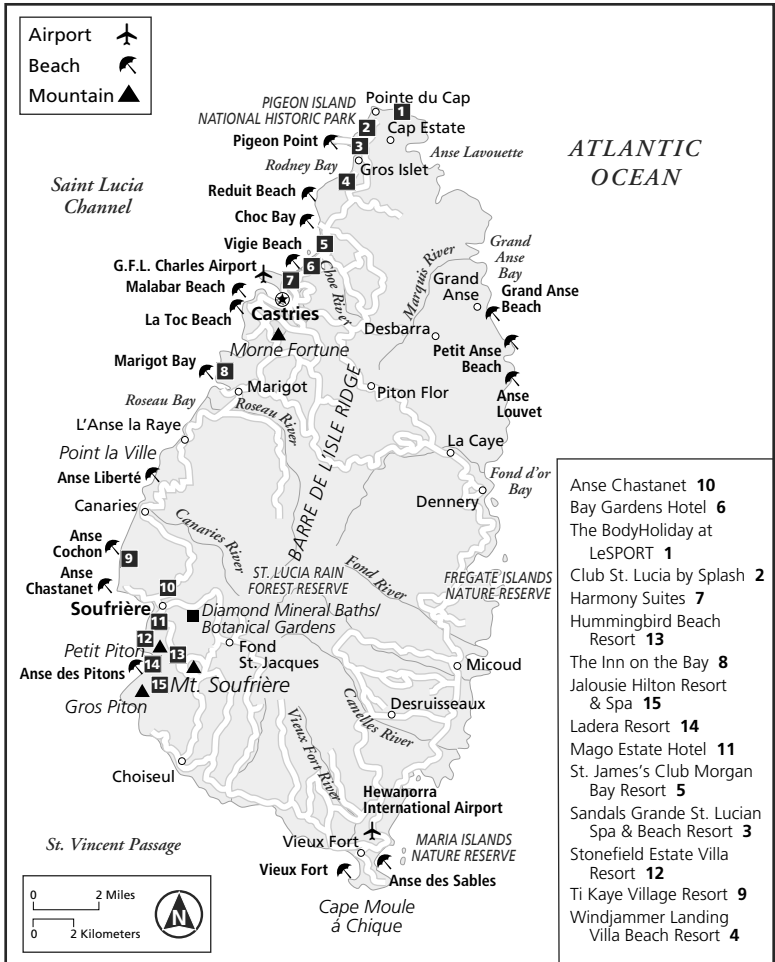


The BodyHoliday at LeSPORT

\$\$\$\$\$ Caribblue Beach

A blond beach waits outside your door, but this 154-room resort offers much more than inviting sand, promoting a concept for the revitalization of both body and soul. *Condé Nast Traveler* recently named it the number-one destination spa in the world and one of the 100 “Best of the Best” resorts in *Travel & Leisure*. This luxury spa and resort lies at the northernmost tip of St. Lucia, a 13km (8-mile) drive from Castries. Everything you do, see, enjoy, drink, eat, and feel (yes, even *feel*) is included in the all-inclusive price. Guests are pampered in a setting of 6 hectares (15 acres), with fountains and luxuriant tropical planting. Steel bands and fire-eaters frequently entertain. During the day, the activity calendar is overloaded, with massages, seaweed wraps, mineral baths, aromatherapy, tai chi, yoga, stress management, and

St. Lucia Accommodations



even dance classes and lessons to improve your golf game at a nearby course. A full water-sports program includes scuba diving and water-skiing. Other facilities include two bars, a tennis court, three pools, and a health club and spa. The well-furnished, first-class rooms are located in a four-story, Mediterranean-style building on a hillside looking down on the long, palm-lined beachfront. You'll also find sliding glass doors opening onto spacious balconies and a view. Meals, served in a choice of three restaurants, are as plush as the accommodations, and the cuisine is arguably the best of all offered by the St. Lucian all-inclusives.

Children age 12 and over are welcome from June 27 to September 25; otherwise, the minimum age is 16 years.

See map p. 379. *Caribblue Beach.* ☎ **800-544-2883.** Fax: 758-450-0368. www.thebodyholiday.com. Rack rates: \$726–\$812 double; \$912 suite for two. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, DISC, MC, V.



Club St. Lucia by Splash

\$\$\$\$ Cap Estate

Lying at the very northern tip of St. Lucia (about 80km/50 miles north of Hewanorra International Airport — arrange for a shuttle pickup before you arrive), immediately east of Pigeon Island National Park, this all-inclusive, 369-room resort stands on a 26-hectare (64-acre) site, with two good sandy beaches at its doorstep. Very sports- and entertainment-oriented, the resort's recent \$6 million renovation has considerably improved it. It sounds corny, but the hotel consists of five fantasy villages, each with a different theme. Perhaps you'll bed down at "Magic Parrot," or "Banana Liming." Accommodations are wide-ranging here, including Romance Rooms in the adults-only Hummingbird Village, with such features as self-service bars, Jacuzzis, and four-poster beds. You might also book into a family suite with a spacious master bedroom and separate sleeping quarters, suitable for two adults and three children. We prefer the deluxe oceanview accommodations with king-size four-poster beds. The food is good and varied in the five restaurants, where recipes range from Asian to Italian. Caribbean grills and buffets are also featured oceanside. Guests receive a discount if they dine at **Great House**, one of the island's premier restaurants (see the listing later in this chapter). The resort offers planned activities in three different kids clubs for various age groups. Other facilities include four bars, a dance club, five pools, nine tennis courts, a fitness center, and a water-sports program.

See map p. 379. *Cap Estate.* ☎ **877-92-SPLASH,** 758-450-0551. Fax: 758-450-0281. www.splashresorts.com. Rack rates: \$330–\$380 double. Rates are all-inclusive. AE, DC, MC, V.

Harmony Suites

\$\$-\$\$\$ Rodney Bay Lagoon

Facing the marina at Rodney Bay, beloved by yachties, this 30-room inn lies only 183m (600 feet) from one of the island's best beaches at Reduit. Alluring a youthful clientele, including families, the complex of two-story buildings offers suites that are well furnished in rattan and wicker and open onto views of a saltwater lagoon. Tiled floors, floral prints, small but well-organized bathrooms, wet bars, refrigerators, and safes make the units especially comfortable, along with the well-equipped kitchenettes that please families. For romantics, eight honeymoon suites open onto the lagoon, furnished with four-poster queen beds and whirlpool tubs. All the suites open onto balconies or patios facing the pool or tropical gardens. On-site is a respectable restaurant serving good Caribbean fare and a pool. The hotel also has a dive site.

See map p. 379. *Rodney Bay Lagoon.* ☎ **758-452-0336.** Fax: 758-452-8677. www.harmonysuites.com. Rack rates: \$150–\$205 double. AE, MC, V.



Hummingbird Beach Resort

\$ Soufrière

Built on the site of a colonial-style mansion, the property is the personal statement of Joan Alexander Stowe (her guests quickly learn to call her Joyce), who started out as a waitress and gradually built her dream resort. The inn's charming ten bedrooms are furnished in part with antique four-poster beds and come with balconies and African wood sculptures for decoration. The better units have peaked ceilings, and mosquito netting is draped over elaborately carved bedsteads. In addition to the standard units, a country cottage, comfortable for two to four guests, is a favorite with families or two couples traveling together. Guests take a dip in the freshwater pool and often dine at the Hummingbird on-site, preferring a table on the veranda to sample Creole-style conch, local lobster, and other West Indian dishes, with some French specialties.

See map p. 379. *Soufrière*. ☎ **800-795-7261, 758-459-7232**. Fax: 758-459-7033. www.istlucia.co.uk. Rack rates: \$70 double; \$160 suite; \$285 cottage for two to four. AE, DISC, MC, V.

The Inn on the Bay

\$\$ Marigot Bay

One of the smallest inns in St. Lucia — housing only five bedrooms — is also one of the best and scenically located, lying 90m (300 feet) above the waters of the Caribbean's most beautiful bay. Proprietors Normand Viau and Louise Boucher designed the hotel themselves. Each of the bedrooms is completely private and spacious, with well-kept bathrooms, a queen-size bed, fridge, ceiling fan, and security doors. Honeymooners and romantics are attracted to this nest. Children under 18 aren't accepted. Breakfast with homemade bread is served on a veranda overlooking the bay. Wait until you try the chocolate croissants. On-site is a small pool, and the golden sand at Marigot Beach is a shuttle-hop away. Restaurants and entertainment are down the hill at Marigot Bay; the hotel will shuttle you back and forth free of charge.

See map p. 379. *Seaview Avenue, Marigot Bay*. ☎ **758-451-4260**. Fax 928-438-3828. www.saint-lucia.com. Rack rates: \$145 double. Rates include breakfast. MC, V.



Jalousie Hilton Resort & Spa

\$\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$\$ Soufrière

This opulent complex sprawls across 130 hectares (325 acres) at one of the most beautiful and lushest tropical oases in the Caribbean. It faces an idyllic palm-fringed beach at the foot of two jagged lava peaks. Offering greater luxury than Anse Chastanet, Jalousie Hilton lies 8km (4.9 miles) south of Soufrière and 40 winding kilometers (25 miles) north of the international airport. Well-heeled guests book the ten-minute helicopter ride from the airport to the hotel's own landing pad. At the core of the complex are two restored sugar mills, where you can lodge in a dozen guest rooms. Much more elegant living is available in the spacious series of

65 villas or 35 villa suites, each with a private plunge pool. Shuttles transport visitors around this hillside property. Interiors are ripped from the pages of *Architectural Digest*, with cathedral-like ceilings, rattan and mahogany furnishings, *Casablanca*-style ceiling fans, white tile floors, and French doors opening onto the palm-fringed beach. Clad in marble, the bathrooms are luxurious with deep tubs, robes, and scales. The cuisine is one of the reasons to stay here. Guests have a choice of four restaurants, our favorite being the elegant **Plantation Restaurant**, serving international and continental cuisine. You can enjoy fresh seafood and Creole specialties at the waterside **Pier Restaurant**. Other facilities include an outdoor pool, a par-3 executive golf course, four Laykold tennis courts, a health club and spa, children's activities, a business center, a dive shop, and a nightclub.

See map p. 379. Bay Street, Soufrière. ☎ 888-744-5256. Fax: 758-459-7667. www.jalousie-hilton.com. Rack rates: \$460 double; \$515 villa; \$730 villa suite. Breakfast and dinner \$70 extra per person per day. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V.



Ladera Resort

\$\$\$\$\$ Soufrière

Ladera looks as if it sprouted from the hilltop, its 6 villas and 19 suites each with an open-wall view to the West, taking in that stunning view. Even with an exposed wall, the architectural layout of the complex is such that privacy is maintained. We totally agree with the *Caribbean Travel and Life* assessment of this posh resort as one of the ten most romantic spots in the West Indies. A special feature is a free-form pool that scenically extends toward the cliff. Tropical hardwoods, stone, and tile, along with 19th-century French antiques or reproductions, fill the bedrooms, and all accommodations come with their own private plunge pools. The resort provides free shuttle service to a good beach at Anse de Pitons. The on-site **Dasheene Restaurant** (reviewed later in this chapter), is one of the finest in St. Lucia. The staff can arrange an array of activities, ranging from rain-forest walks to sailing excursions to the Grenadines.

See map p. 379. Soufrière. ☎ 800-738-4752, 758-459-7323. Fax: 758-459-5156. www.ladera.com. Rack rates: \$395–\$560 one- or two-bedroom suite; \$600–\$820 villa. Breakfast and dinner \$65 extra per person per day. Three-night minimum stay. AE, MC, V.

Mago Estate Hotel

\$\$-\$\$\$ Soufrière

Opening onto one of the Caribbean's most panoramic backdrops, the Pitons, this lush estate lies directly north of the fishing village of Soufrière. Its German-born owner, Peter Gloser, named his ten-room inn "Mago," meaning mango in patois. Not only mango trees, but mahogany, papaya, banana, and *maracuya* (passion fruit) trees envelop the property. The staff will take you to nearby beaches in a free shuttle. Each room opens onto a view of the Pitons and is decorated with hand-carved furniture and antiques. Rooms are divided among the "Eden" units — luxury accommodations with panoramic sea views, a terrace, and plunge pool — and the

six varieties of “Shangrila” rooms, each decorated in different styles. Four large bedrooms are the most recently built units, each with teakwood furnishings and handcrafted antiques along with plunge pools and hammocks for the lazy life. The food, a quality blend of Creole and French specialties, is carefully prepared, based on fresh ingredients, and served at communal tables with carved African chairs.

See map p. 379. *Palm Mist, Soufrière.* ☎ 758-459-5880. Fax: 758-459-7352. www.magohotel.com. Rack rates: \$200–\$500 double. Rates include breakfast. MC, V.



St. James's Club Morgan Bay Resort **\$\$\$\$ Choc Bay, Gros Islet**

Catering mainly to Europeans, this all-inclusive resort stands on 8.9 hectares (22 acres) of landscaped grounds a ten-minute drive north of Castries. The hotel opens onto a palm-fringed beachfront of white sand. Unlike some all-inclusives on the island, this 240-room pile welcomes children. The club emphasizes day-and-night activities that range from theme buffets to scuba diving and deep-sea fishing. The food is good and bountiful, and you can work off the extra carbs in the health club or by swimming in one of two outdoor pools, playing tennis on four courts, or participating in water sports. If all else fails, you have the sauna and steam room. Rooms come in a variety of categories and are spread across a half-dozen different outbuildings. The most standard units, each midsize, offer private verandas, rattan and wicker furnishings, fridges, and queen-size or twin beds. Superior rooms are on the second floor, offering better views, and the deluxe units are oceanfront. Bathrooms are well maintained and trimmed in marble. Children are especially catered to with special programs. Local musicians, steel bands, and calypso singers keep you entertained in the evening.

See map p. 379. *Choc Bay, Gros Islet.* ☎ 800-345-0356, 758-450-2511. Fax: 758-450-1050. www.eliteislandvacations.com. Rack rates: \$460–\$496 double; \$660 suite for two. Rates are all-inclusive. Children ages 13–18 in parent's room \$100; ages 3–12, \$60; ages 2 and under free. MC, V.

Sandals Grande St. Lucian Spa & Beach Resort **\$\$\$\$–\$\$\$\$\$ Gros Islet**

Sandals operates three all-inclusive, couples-only (that's male/female couples only) resorts in St. Lucia, and this one is the best. We much prefer the laid-back elegance of Ladera or Anse Chastanet, but if you're a Sandals fan, this is as good as it gets on the island. The resort lies at the causeway on the northern tip of the island linking the main island with Pigeon Island. Originally, this was a Hyatt, standing 10km (6 miles) northwest of Castries at Rodney Bay. The sea surrounds the resort on both sides, and rooms open onto panoramic vistas. The 284 rooms are tastefully and rather luxuriously furnished, each with a private veranda along with designer bathrooms. Our favorites are the two dozen lagoon pool rooms where you can swim right up to your own patio. Service is a feature in the concierge rooms and suites with a staff at your beck and call 24 hours a day. The setting is on a

1-hectare (2.4-acre) lagoon, with a private beach of golden sand, although many guests prefer the lavish lagoonlike swimming pool. All the rooms, even the standard ones, are quite large and furnished with plantation-style antique reproductions. The better views are on the fourth floor. Inquire about the “Stay at One, Play at Three” exchange program where you stay at one Sandals resort and use the facilities at all three — a nice way to avoid the “resort-bound” blues. Even on-site, you hardly dine in the same place every night — the resort has six specialty restaurants. Facilities include three bars, five outdoor pools, four tennis courts, a health club and spa, plus a dive shop. Golf is available at the nearby Sandals Regency, and water sports, such as snorkeling and windsurfing, can be arranged.

See map p. 379. *Pigeon Island Causeway, Gros Islet.* ☎ **888-SANDALS** (888-726-3257), 758-455-2000. Fax: 758-455-2001. www.sandals.com. Rack rates: \$370–\$540 double; from \$630 suite for two. Rates are per person and all-inclusive. AE, MC, V.

Stonefield Estate Villa Resort **\$\$-\$\$\$\$ Soufrière**

At the base of Petit Piton, this 16-room resort lies in the Southwest, covering a lush 10-hectare (26-acre) site complete with views at every turn and nature trails. The complex consists of a plantation house and a series of cottages with one, two, or three bedrooms each. The location is 2km (1¼ miles) south of Soufrière and 38km (23 miles) northwest of the Hewanorra airport. Guests who anchor at this secluded tropical oasis use the beach at the Jalousie Hilton (see the listing earlier in this chapter), a five-minute shuttle ride away. All the rentals are furnished with antiques and come with high ceilings, verandas, full bathrooms with intimate outdoor garden showers, and fully furnished kitchens. Mosquito netting covers the beds. The on-site Mango Tree Restaurant serves first-rate meals, using locally caught fish and fresh fruits and vegetables. Guests gather to toast the sunset at the Bamboo Bar, having swum earlier that day in a pool whose flagstone deck juts out over the edge of a cliff.

See map p. 379. *Stonefield Villas, Soufrière.* ☎ **758-459-5648**. Fax: 758-459-5550. www.stonefieldvillas.com. Rack rates: \$190–\$330 one-bedroom villa; \$242–\$480 two-bedroom villa; \$535–\$600 three-bedroom villa. AE, MC, V.

Ti Kaye Village Resort **\$\$\$ Anse Cochon**

Ti Kaye Village Resort is a rare find and a retreat for escapists, built on a cliff overlooking the sea and standing on 6.4 hectares (16 acres) of lush grounds on the island’s West Coast, about halfway between Castries and Soufrière. *Ti Kaye* means “small house” in local patois, and this charming little hideaway consists of 33 handsomely furnished and comfortable cottages opening onto panoramic views. Some of the units are in individual cottages, the rest in duplex villas. Furnishings are of local white cedar, and the design is traditional West Indian, each cottage with a large veranda featuring a hammock for two plus a king-size four-poster bed and a private

open-air garden shower. You must take a steep stairwell of 166 steps to get down to a cove of silver sand and an excellent dive shop. An international chef serves scrumptious meals, often using local produce and freshly caught fish. Of course, you can dine elsewhere, but we highly recommend you eat here at night. Other facilities include a sunset bar, fitness center, and an outdoor pool.

See map p. 379. Anse Cochon. ☎ 758-456-8101. Fax: 758-456-8105. www.tikaye.com. Rack rates: \$180–\$320 double. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V.



Windjammer Landing Villa Beach Resort

\$\$-\$\$\$\$ Labrelotte Bay

This unique St. Lucian resort is built like a village, with brick paths cut through 22 hectares (55 acres) of tropical landscaping directly north of Reduit Beach and a 20-minute drive north of Castries, but a long hour-and-a-half haul from the Hewanorra airport. The complex of Mediterranean-style villas opens onto the sea and a stretch of cream-colored sand. Windjammer Landing is an all-suite and villa resort, with the larger units containing their own private plunge pools. Although honeymooners come here, it's a family favorite, with a teen program, a children's club, nanny services, and two children's pools in addition to two regular pools. All the decor is light, breezy, and tropical, and each unit comes with a terrace or patio facing the garden or the ocean, plus a fully equipped kitchen and a spacious combination bathroom, along with a sun deck. Dining is in one of five restaurants that range from a barbecue grill on the beach to the Asian-influenced **Dragonfly**. For an extra change of culinary pace, **Papa Don's** serves pizza and pasta, and **The Upper Deck** features seafood delicacies. Other facilities include three bars, two tennis courts, a fitness center, and a dive shop plus other water sports.

See map p. 379. Labrelotte Bay. ☎ 800-958-7376. Fax: 758-456-9000. www.windjammer-landing.com. Rack rates: \$200 double; \$395–\$485 one-bedroom villa for two; \$640 two-bedroom villa for four. Breakfast and dinner \$55 extra per person per day. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V.

Dining Out

With the arrival of the all-inclusives, independent restaurants are being choked out of visitors' cash. Some excellent restaurants have closed because thousands of visitors prefer to stay at their hotels at night. Not only are the roads bad and poorly lit after dark, but also many guests have already paid for their dinner as part of their overall package.

Even though many guests are resort-bound at night, the picture isn't entirely dismal. Some resorts have several restaurants, and for the most part the fare is first-rate, a selection of American, Asian, and continental dishes, with the inevitable Caribbean buffets for extra spice.



Reservations in winter are important at the top-ranked restaurants even if you're staying at an all-inclusive. Guests at a hotel learn what the best specialty restaurants are and quickly book up all the seats at the choice dining spots, some patrons preferring to make their reservations even before they fly to St. Lucia.

Our advice is to make dinner reservations when booking your room. Otherwise, you're likely to be dining at a resort's less-appealing restaurant, even though you paid the same price as the guy enjoying the best table in — say, the Japanese specialty restaurant.

For an island with the tourist flow of St. Lucia, you'd expect a lot more top-quality specialty restaurants. What you get isn't bad, but the choice seems a bit small. Consider for the moment that some resorts in St. Lucia have six restaurants and ten bars.

Although islanders will deny it, St. Lucia has no distinctive cuisine like Cuba, Jamaica, or Puerto Rico. Its specialties, which are truly excellent, follow along with West Indian culinary traditions. We're talking banana bread, fried plantain, fried flying fish, stuffed crab backs, callaloo soup, stuffed breadfruit, and baked lobster.

The Best Restaurants

Camilla's Restaurant & Bar \$\$-\$\$\$ Soufrière CREOLE

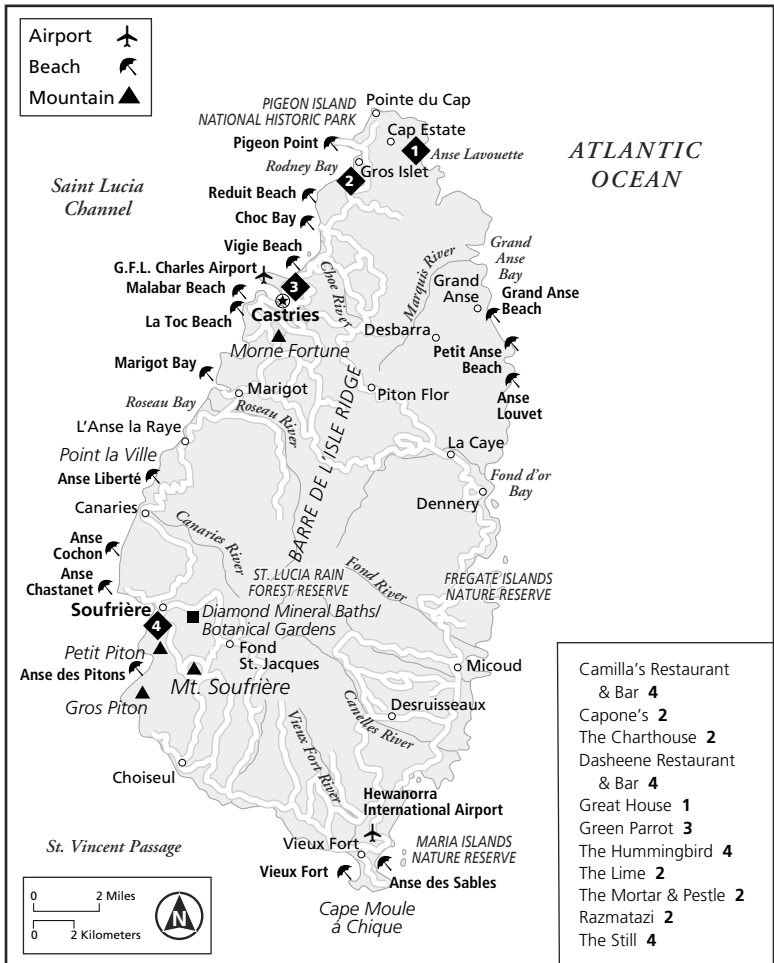
A block inland from the waterfront at a little fishing harbor, this typically West Indian second-floor restaurant serves local fare that's among the best in the area — and the prices are right. Local matriarch Camilla Alcindor shops the local markets, seeking the best of island produce and stopping off at the fish market to see what the catch of the day brought in. Back in her little kitchen, she prepares her specialties, including an island fish Creole and fresh lobster, which she'll prepare thermidor style if you want. She doesn't even attempt to compete with the megaresorts but turns out a straightforward and unpretentious cuisine, of which her mother might approve. Chicken curry is an island favorite, and at lunch the restaurant offers the usual array of sandwiches, fresh salads, omelets, and the inevitable burgers. Try for a table on the balcony overlooking street life below.

See map p. 387. 7 Bridge St. ☎ 758-459-5379. Main courses: \$10–\$33. AE, DISC, MC, V. Open: Daily 8 a.m.–11 p.m.

Capone's \$\$\$ Reduit Beach, Rodney Bay ITALIAN/CARIBBEAN

Capone's take on the gangster days of Chicago in the speakeasy 1920s is a bit much — as if the place were a screen backdrop for that old Marilyn Monroe classic *Some Like It Hot* — but the food is good and the joint works,

St. Lucia Dining



even if it's a bit gimmicky. Near the lagoon, the location is just north of Reduit Beach, where you'll probably spend most of your day. Naturally, in a dive calling itself Capone's, you expect "Little Caesar salad" to lead off the menu. Ingredients are fresh and well chosen, and the chefs are good, especially when they're grilling the fresh local catch of the day to perfection or throwing the island's best steaks on another grill. Next door is **La Piazza**, where typical American fare such as burgers, well-stuffed sandwiches, and savory pizzas are served noon to midnight Tuesday to Sunday.

See map above. Reduit Beach, Rodney Bay. ☎ 758-452-0284. Reservations recommended. Main courses: \$18–\$44. AE, MC, V. Open: Tues–Sun 3 p.m. to midnight.

The Charthouse**\$\$\$ Rduit Beach, Rodney Bay AMERICAN/CREOLE**

The setting of the Charthouse is a Caribbean cliché — an open-air dining room overlooking a yacht harbor. Favored by yachties, this restaurant is one of the oldest and most frequented on the island, in a spacious sky-lit building with a mahogany bar. Outside in the water rest some of the most expensive yachts sailing the West Indies. This place is one of the best in St. Lucia to sample dishes with real island flavor. Our favorites are pumpkin soup, stuffed crab backs, and baby-back ribs along with fresh local lobster. The chargrilled steaks are also a delight, but the chef's specialty is the best roast prime rib of beef on the island.

See map p. 387. Rduit Beach, Rodney Bay. ☎ 758-452-8115. Reservations recommended. Main courses: \$19–\$33. AE, MC, V. Open: Daily 6–10:30 p.m.

**Dasheene Restaurant & Bar****\$\$\$\$ Soufrière CARIBBEAN/INTERNATIONAL**

Dasheene, in the previously recommended pocket of posh, **Ladera Resort**, is one of the most celebrated restaurants on the island — and with good reason. This stellar dining room enjoys a grand setting, opening onto views of the towering and forested Pitons set against the backdrop of the Caribbean Sea. Out on the terrace, with lights twinkling in the distance, the restaurant provides one of the most memorable romantic settings. The imaginative menu spotlights the finest of Caribbean cuisine, with a nouvelle touch, but also offers an array of international dishes. Launch your repast with such offerings as a garden salad of local greens or *christophene* (a squashlike vegetable) and coconut soup. The chef has a special flair for his pasta studded with “fruits of the sea,” and his marinated sirloin steak is cooked to perfection. His roast chicken is also stuffed with a savory mixture of sweet red peppers, onions, and seasoned bread crumbs. We always opt for the catch of the day, often red snapper grilled to perfection or else baked kingfish. To make the night yours, order the chocolate soufflé flambé.

See map p. 387. At the Ladera Resort, between Gros and Petit Piton. ☎ 758-459-7323. Reservations recommended. Main courses: \$22–\$33. AE, MC, V. Open: Daily 7:30–10 a.m., noon to 2:30 p.m., and 6:30–9:30 p.m.

**Great House****\$\$\$\$ Cap Estate FRENCH/CREOLE/INTERNATIONAL**

At the far northern tip of St. Lucia, the island's most acclaimed restaurant lies on the original foundation stones of a plantation Great House — hence, its name. You can find no more-elegant or more-romantic setting on the island than this dining room, which evokes the heyday of the rich planters whose wealth regrettably was based on slave labor. The refined service is St. Lucia's finest and most hospitable. Because the menu changes nightly,

you never know what you're going to get. The chefs always adjust the menu to take advantage of the freshest and best ingredients in any season. You're likely to have your choice from such delectable fare as a starter of shrimp and scallops in a cheese sauce, followed by duck breast in a honey and balsamic vinegar sauce, or even a pork pepper pot. Desserts are luscious here, including a recently sampled passion-fruit cheesecake.

See map p. 387. *Cap Estate*. ☎ 758-450-0450. Reservations required. Main courses: \$21–\$37. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Open: Tues–Sun 6:30–10 p.m.

Green Parrot

\$\$\$ **Morne Fortune, Castries** CONTINENTAL/CARIBBEAN

Chef Harry, who trained at the prestigious Claridges in London, is the island's most celebrated chef. His domain lies 2km (1½ miles) east of the center of Castries overlooking the attractively lit harbor at night. If you're walking it, count on 12 minutes — at a hearty pace. Guests come here for the entire evening, preferring to arrive early for an apéritif in the Victorian-inspired bar. The bartender's special is a Grass Parrot, made from coconut cream, crème de menthe, bananas, and white rum. The formal dining room is inspired by the British colonial era, and free entertainment on Wednesday and Saturday nights most definitely includes a limbo contest and a fire-eater. Whenever possible, Harry features St. Lucian specialties, using produce grown on the island and the fresh catch of the day. Beef-eaters go for the tender steak or mixed grill, perhaps beginning with the Creole soup prepared with callaloo (a spinachlike vegetable) and fresh pumpkin. Usually, five different curry dishes are available. Harry also rents inexpensively priced but comfortably furnished bedrooms with air-conditioning and phones, doubles costing only \$100 a night, including breakfast.

See map p. 387. *Chef Harry Drive, Morne Fortune*. ☎ 758-452-3399. Reservations recommended. Lunch main courses: \$17–\$22. Prix-fixe dinner: \$35–\$46. AE, MC, V. Open: Daily 7 a.m. to midnight.

The Hummingbird

\$\$\$ **Soufrière** CARIBBEAN/INTERNATIONAL

As you dine at this West Indian spot, you can enjoy the gardens and the local cuisine. Those gardens are likely to be fluttering with the namesake of this restaurant at this previously recommended island inn. Most visitors stop off here for lunch, when you can see the panoramic view of the Pitons, but dinner is magical as well. The freshwater crayfish in garlic or lime butter is our favorite meal, although you can also order Creole-style conch, freshly caught lobster, and filets of both snapper and grouper, each grilled to perfection. Of course, during the day you may settle happily for such American staples as a BLT or a juicy burger.

See map p. 387. *At the Hummingbird Beach Resort, Soufrière*. ☎ 758-459-7232. Reservations recommended. Main courses: \$17–\$44. AE, DISC, MC, V. Open: Daily 8:30 a.m.–11 p.m.

The Lime**\$\$ Rodney Bay AMERICAN/CREOLE**

North of Reduit Beach, this old island favorite stands in an area increasingly known as “restaurant row” in St. Lucia. With its namesake lime-green curtains, the Lime is one of the most typical of all the bistros on the island. From seafood to steaks and chops, the fare is familiar, but the food is good and prepared with quality ingredients. In an open-air setting, you can begin with the bartender’s special lime drink while perusing the menu. Fresh lobster frequently appears, as does the catch of the day. We recently enjoyed a zesty red snapper with island spices. The steaks emerge as you like them from a sizzling charcoal grill, and lamb and pork chops are always on hand. A specialty is roti, like a Caribbean burrito. Lighter fare, including well-made sandwiches, is available at lunch.

See map p. 387. *Rodney Bay.* ☎ **758-452-0761.** *Reservations recommended for dinner. Main courses: \$13–\$31. MC, V. Open: Wed–Mon 8 a.m.–1 a.m.*

The Mortar & Pestle**\$\$\$ Rodney Bay Lagoon CARIBBEAN/INTERNATIONAL**

At this waterfront restaurant, with its view of the lagoon, you get a choice of dining alfresco or indoors. For inspiration, the chefs roam the world, not just the southern Caribbean. The rich menu is likely to reflect recipes from Africa, England, France, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, India, China, and even some Amerindian dishes. You’ll fill up on such rib-sticking fare as Bajan flying fish, Grenadian stuffed jack fish, Jamaican salt fish, or Guyana pepper pot. The stuffed crab backs are worth the trip, as is the rich and creamy conch chowder. Sometimes a steel band entertains at night.

See map p. 387. *At the Harmony Suites, Rodney Bay Lagoon.* ☎ **758-452-8711.** *Reservations recommended. Main courses: \$15–\$35. DISC, MC, V. Open: Daily 7 a.m.–11 p.m.*

**Razmatazi****\$ Reduit Beach Marina INDIAN**

Guests staying at one of the resorts along Reduit Beach, including the Royal St. Lucian, often flock to this eatery for a change of pace. Razmatazi brings the cookery of the subcontinent to St. Lucia, especially those tantalizing tandoori dishes. In a building painted a medley of colors with lots of gingerbread, the restaurant lies only a two-minute walk from the beach. We could fill up on the delectable appetizers alone, including fresh local fish marinated in a spicy yogurt and cooked in the tandoor or the mulligatawny soup made with lentils, herbs, and spices. Save your appetite for the tandoori dishes made with shrimp, fresh fish (especially red snapper), or chicken. Vegetarians will be happy with the best on-island assortment of tasty vegetable dishes. Live music entertains guests on weekends.

See map p. 387. *Reduit Beach Marina.* ☎ **758-452-9800.** *Reservations recommended. Main courses: \$7.40–\$15. MC, V. Open: Fri–Wed 4–11 p.m.*

The Still**\$\$\$\$ Soufrière CREOLE**

Right on the beach, this small inn lies less than a mile from Soufrière on the grounds of a plantation that grows citrus, cocoa, and copra. A pool landscaped into the lush tropical scene adds to the allure, and walks are possible in almost any direction. The site opens onto views of the towering Pitons in the distance. One of the most atmospheric and authentic island places, The Still is an ideal luncheon stopover in your tour of the southern tier of St. Lucia. In the more-formal and spacious dining room, you can feast on excellently prepared St. Lucian specialties, depending on what is fresh at the market that day. Try to avoid the place when it's over-run with cruise-ship passengers or tour groups.

See map p. 387. Soufrière. ☎ 758-459-7224. Reservations recommended. Main courses: \$21–\$59. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Open: Daily 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

Enjoying the Sand and Surf

Rivaling the British Virgin Islands and the Grenadines (owned by St. Vincent), the fame of St. Lucia as a yachties' haven is growing, mainly because of its Marigot and Rodney bays along with Castries Harbour. The world's largest transatlantic sailing rally takes place here between November and the end of December.

The coral reefs surrounding the island are beautiful to explore. In addition, beautiful white sandy beaches edge the tranquil leeward side of St. Lucia — and are the best beaches for swimming. The waters on the windward or Atlantic side are more rugged with a rough surf, and swimming often isn't safe here.

Combing the beaches

All beaches in St. Lucia are open to the public, even those sands in front of the megaresorts. Most of the major resorts are built right on the sands so you can be out of your bedroom and into the water in minutes. Because St. Lucia offers some of the most dramatic views in the Caribbean, other resorts prefer to locate on hillsides but with easy access to the beach, either by stairs or a shuttle that will whisk you there in two to five minutes.

One of the best beaches in St. Lucia — and therefore the most popular — is **Reduit Beach**, stretching for 2km (1 mile) of soft beige sand along clear waters at Rodney Bay. This site hosts many resorts and also boasts the largest concentration of water-sports kiosks, especially along the strips bordering Royal St. Lucien Hotel. Many bars and restaurants are located here. Of course, if you come onto hotel grounds and patronize any of the facilities, you have to pay extra. Otherwise, the beaches are free.

Directly north of Reduit Beach is **Pigeon Point Beach**, lying off the northern shoreline and a part of the Pigeon Island National Historic Park (see “Exploring on Dry Land,” later in the chapter). Pigeon Island is joined to the mainland of St. Lucia by a causeway. The beach here is one of the best in St. Lucia, filled with white sand, but it’s small. Before coming over to Pigeon Island, many visitors secure the makings for a picnic lunch.



Another good beach is **Choc Bay**, lying immediately south of Rodney Bay and Reduit Beach. Convenient to Castries and many of the mega-resorts, Choc Bay is a long stretch of golden sands against a backdrop of palm trees. Waters here are usually so tranquil that the locale has become a favorite with families, especially those with small children. The beach is easily accessible from the main road.

As you head down the coast, moving closer to Castries, you encounter more beaches, coming first upon **Vigie Beach**, which stretches for 3km (2 miles) of white sand. At one point, this beach runs parallel to the runway at Vigie Airport (also called George F.L. Charles Airport). Vigie Beach offers fine beige sand that slopes gently into the gin-clear waters. A final beach in the vicinity of Castries is **La Toc Beach**, which lies just south of the capital, opening onto a crescent-shaped bay and filled with golden sand.

Leaving the area around Castries and continuing in a southerly direction, you reach the calm waters of **Marigot Bay Beach** — a favorite of the yachting crowd. One of the most beautiful coves in the Caribbean, Marigot Bay is our favorite, and it’s framed on three sides by steep forested hills, the beach itself set against a grove of palms. The beaches along this bay are small but choice. You can lie on them and take in a view of some of the most expensive yachts sailing in the West Indies. Several restaurants around the bay are open for lunch.

Between Marigot Bay and the fishing village of Soufrière are some other good beaches, notably **Anse Cochon**, lying directly north of Soufrière. If you like your sand white, however, stay away. Although the waters here are crystal clear, the sands, which feel like those of a perfect white-sand beach, are black volcanic. The shallow reefs are excellent for snorkeling, and the beach offers picture-postcard Caribbean charm — which makes it favored for romantic trysts. Anse Cochon is reachable only by boat and offers no facilities.

One of the most idyllic beaches of St. Lucia is found at **Anse Chastanet**, to the immediate north of Soufrière. Towering palms provide shade from the noonday sun, and the lush hills form a backdrop for this dark sandy strip. Scuba divers go exploring off the coast.

After passing through Soufrière and continuing south, you come to the next good beach, **Anse des Pitons**, lying between the twin peaks and opening onto Jalousie Bay, a crescent-shaped body of water. The owners

of the Jalousie Hilton have transformed this natural black-sand beach into a white-sand beach by importing the sand. Divers and snorkelers alike are attracted to this popular beach, along with patrons of the resort.

Finally, at the very southern tip of St. Lucia are two small beaches. At **Vieux Fort**, coral reefs protect the tranquil waters, making them ideal for swimming. At the southern end on the windward side of St. Lucia, **Anse des Sables** opens onto a shallow bay swept by trade winds, which make it more ideal for windsurfing than for swimming.

Playing in the surf

In recent years, water sports as an activity have become more and more developed, as new outfitters have opened up kiosks on the beaches. Anse Chastanet, near the Pitons on the Southwest Coast, is a dive experience that attracts scuba divers from the States in large numbers. The diving here doesn't compare to Grand Cayman, but it's a thrilling experience to explore underwater reefs with stunning coral walls; you can rent snorkeling equipment from your hotel or from any number of scuba-diving outfitters. Kayaking has become big business in St. Lucia, which offers adventurers a combination of both ocean and river kayaking. Finally, windsurfing is also establishing a foothold on the island, with most resorts offering the sport.

Scuba diving

Most of the waters off the coast of St. Lucia are crystal clear, often with a visibility of 30 to 46m (100 to 150 feet). The island is surrounded by coral reefs, and most scuba activity consists of reef diving. Lately, the government has been creating artificial reefs by sinking old boats, and wreck diving is growing in popularity. You can reach many of the most dramatic dive sites after only a 20-minute boat ride from shore.



At **Anse Cochon**, both north and south reefs, beach dives with coral and boulders start in 1.5m (5 feet) of water. The north reef descends to 12m (40 feet), but the south reef remains shallow to a depth of 9.1m (30 feet). A 50m (165-foot) freighter was sunk off the coast in 18m (60 feet) of water to create an artificial reef teeming with damselfish, wrasse, grunts, yellow snapper, spotted drums, and both parrot and goat fish. A Japanese dredger was sunk at the south end of Anse Cochon and almost immediately became a favorite abode of eels and barracudas.

Another site rich in coral and rainbow-hued marine life is **Anse La Raye Wall**, midway up the West Coast. Such fish as spotted drums, Bermuda chubs, and jacks live in these waters, as do purple vase sponges and soft coral.

One of our favorite scuba-diving outfitters in St. Lucia is **Dive Fair Helen** (☎ 888-855-2206, 758-451-7716). A one-day package (two dives) costs \$84, with a two-day (four dives) package going for \$155.

In the Anse Chastanet Hotel in Soufrière, **Scuba St. Lucia** (☎ 758-459-7000; www.scubastlucia.com) offers one of the world's top dive locations at a five-star PADI dive center. At the southern end of Anse Chastanet's 0.4km (quarter-mile-long), secluded beach, it features premier diving and comprehensive facilities for divers of all levels. Some of the most spectacular coral reefs of St. Lucia, many only 3 to 6m (10 to 20 feet) below the surface, lie a short distance from the beach. However, the underwater reef drops off from 7.6m (25 feet) to some 41m (135 feet) in a panoramic, multicolored coral wall.

Many professional PADI instructors offer five dive programs a day. Photographic equipment is available for rent (they can process film on the premises), and picture-taking instruction is available. Experienced divers can rent any equipment they need. PADI certification courses are available for \$535. A two- to three-hour introductory lesson costs \$85 and includes a short theory session, equipment familiarization, development of skills in shallow water, a tour of the reef, and all equipment. Single dives cost \$50, including equipment rental. Hours are from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.

Another full-service scuba center, on St. Lucia's Southwest Coast, is at the **Jalousie Hilton**, Soufrière (☎ 758-456-8000). The PADI center offers dives in St. Lucia's National Marine Park, where numerous shallow reefs lie near the shore. The diver certification program is available to hotel guests and other visitors ages 12 and up. Prices range from \$65 for a single dive to \$535 for a certification course. A daily resort course for noncertified divers includes a supervised dive from the beach and costs \$83. A ten-dive package is \$347; a six-dive package is \$237. All prices include equipment, tax, and service charges.

Snorkeling

Most dive boats welcome snorkelers, charging them about \$25 per person, including equipment, to go along on a trip. In the southern Caribbean, St. Lucia is one of the finest islands for snorkelers, because of its caverns, walls, coral reefs, and trenches teeming with rainbow-hued fish. Many of these sites lie right off West Coast beaches and within the marine reserves. **Dive Fair Helen** (☎ 758-451-7716; www.divefairhelen.com) is the best outfitter for snorkelers, showing a *Discover the Underwater World* video and providing a *Snorkeler's Field Guide*, which offers previews of the sights and fish you may see. Its resort course for snorkelers costs \$50, including taxi and boat transfers plus equipment.

Ocean and river kayaking

Dive Fair Helen hooks you up with the best kayaking in the area, offering both river kayaking and coastal kayaking. A two-hour river kayaking tour, costing \$50 per person, starts from Marigot Bay and runs along the West Coast of the island on the River Roseau. The estuary is the feeding ground for many tropical birds. A three-hour coastal kayaking tour, costing

\$60 per person, starts from Anse Cochon and runs along the tranquil West Coast, passing fishing villages. Guests disembark at one point and take a short hike inland for lunch.

Windsurfing

Chances are, if you're staying at one of the big resorts along the West Coast, your hotel will offer windsurfing. As mentioned, the areas around **Vieux Fort** and **Anse de Sables** on the southern tip of the island are best for windsurfers. On the Northeast Coast, opening onto the rugged Atlantic, the best spot is **Cas-en-Bas**.



Island windsurfers tell us that August, September, and October are the worst months for windsurfing, because the winds seem to die down at this time.

The best place to hook up with windsurfing is at **St. Lucian Watersports** at the Rex St. Lucian Hotel (☎ 758-452-8351) at Reduit Beach opening onto Rodney Bay. Windsurfers are available for \$20 per half hour or \$40 an hour. In the South, try **Island Windsurfing** at Anse de Sables (☎ 758-454-7400), which charges the same price.

Climbing aboard

Sunlink Tours, Reduit Beach Avenue, Rodney Bay (☎ 800-SUN-LINK or 800-786-5465; 758-456-9100; www.sunlinktours.com), offers the widest array of tours, many of them specially organized and on the water. The most extensive tour, *Tout Bagay* (meaning “a little bit of everything” in Creole dialect), costs \$90 for adults and \$43 for children 2 to 11, and sails down the coastline in a catamaran to visit the drive-in volcano and an 18th-century working plantation where cocoa is produced. The price includes a buffet lunch. Kids love the tour aboard St. Lucia’s famed “pirate ship,” the *Brig Unicorn*, which is 42m (138 feet) long and 7.6m (25 feet) wide. The *Unicorn* is a replica of a mid-19th century, two-masted, fully square-rigged brig featured in the TV film *Roots*. For \$95 for adults and \$40 for children 2 to 11, you embark on a full-day sail around Rodney Bay, going on to Soufrière and the twin peaks of the Pitons; breakfast and lunch are included. Other tours include dolphin- and whale-watching jaunts, costing \$70 for adults or children; half-day deep-sea-fishing charters at \$99 per passenger; or an around-the-island scenic tour, costing \$60 for adults and \$35 for children 2 to 11. Many other tours, including rain-forest jaunts, are available; ask about the company’s entire repertoire.

The island also offers several charter-boat operations for half-day or whole-day deep-sea-fishing jaunts. Most hotels can arrange fishing expeditions. Otherwise, you can call **Mako Watersports** (☎ 758-452-0412), which offers half-day fishing trips for \$350 (four people) or full-day trips for \$720. **Captain Mike’s** (☎ 758-452-7044) also conducts fishing trips, renting boats for four to six people for \$400 to \$500 per half-day or \$750 to \$900 for a whole day. Seasonal catches include regular mackerel and king mackerel along with kingfish, sailfish, white marlin, tuna, and the fierce barracuda.

Exploring on Dry Land

Lovely little towns, beautiful beaches and secluded bays, mineral baths, banana plantations — St. Lucia has all this and more. You can even visit a volcano. This island is a far lusher and more-tropical destination than other “Saints” in this guide, including St. Croix, St. Thomas, and Sint Maarten/St. Martin.

Castries

Most tours of St. Lucia begin in its capital city of **Castries**. The capital city has grown up around its harbor, which occupies the crater of an extinct volcano. Charter captains and the yachting set drift in here, and large cruise-ship wharves welcome vessels from around the world. Because several devastating fires destroyed almost all the old buildings, the town today looks new, with glass-and-concrete (or steel) buildings rather than the French colonial or Victorian look typical of many West Indian capitals.

Castries may be architecturally dull, but its **public market** is one of the most fascinating in the West Indies, and our favorite people-watching site on the island. It goes full blast every day of the week except Sunday and is most active on Friday and Saturday mornings. The market stalls are a block from Columbus Square along Peynier Street, running down toward the water. The countrywomen dress traditionally, with cotton headdresses; the number of knotted points on top reveals their marital status (ask one of the locals to explain it to you). The luscious fruits and vegetables of St. Lucia may be new to you; the array of color alone is astonishing. Sample one of the numerous varieties of bananas: In St. Lucia, they’re allowed to ripen on the tree and taste completely different from those picked green and sold at supermarkets in the United States. You can also pick up St. Lucian handicrafts such as baskets and unglazed pottery here.

To the south of Castries looms **Morne Fortune**, the inappropriately named “Hill of Good Luck.” In the 18th century, some of the most savage battles between the French and the British took place here. You can visit the military cemetery, a small museum, the old powder magazine, and the “Four Apostles Battery” (a quartet of grim muzzle-loading cannons). Government House, now the official residence of the governor-general of St. Lucia, is one of the few examples of Victorian architecture that escaped destruction by fire. The private gardens are beautifully planted, aflame with scarlet and purple bougainvillea. Morne Fortune also offers what many consider the most scenic lookout perch in the Caribbean. The view of the harbor of Castries is panoramic: You can see north to Pigeon Island or south to the Pitons; on a clear day, you may even spot Martinique. To reach Morne Fortune, head east on Bridge Street.

Pigeon Island National Historic Park

St. Lucia’s first national park, **Pigeon Island National Historic Park**, is joined to the mainland by a causeway. On its West Coast are two white-sand beaches (see “Combing the beaches,” earlier in this chapter) and a

restaurant, *Jambe de Bois*, named for a wooden-legged pirate who once used the island as a hideout.

Pigeon Island offers an **Interpretation Centre**, equipped with artifacts and a multimedia display on local history, ranging from the Amerindian occupation of A.D. 1000 to the Battle of the Saints, when Admiral Rodney's fleet set out from Pigeon Island and defeated Admiral De Grasse in 1782. The Captain's Cellar Olde English Pub lies under the center and is evocative of an 18th-century English bar.

Pigeon Island, only 18 hectares (44 acres), got its name from the red-neck pigeon, or ramier, that once colonized this island in huge numbers. Now the site of a Sandals Hotel and interconnected to the St. Lucian mainland, the island offers pleasant panoramas but no longer the sense of isolated privacy that reigned here prior to its development. Parts of it, those far from the hotel on-premises, seem appropriate for nature walks. For more information, call the exhibition center at ☎ 758-452-2231.

Rodney Bay

The scenic **Rodney Bay** is a 15-minute drive north of Castries. Set on a man-made lagoon, it has become a chic center for nightlife, hotels, and restaurants — in fact, it's the most active place on the island after dark. Its marina is one of the top water-sports centers in the Caribbean and a destination every December for the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers, when yachties cross the Atlantic to meet and compare stories.

Marigot Bay

Movie crews, including those for Sophia Loren's *Fire Power*, have used **Marigot Bay**, one of the most beautiful in the Caribbean, for background shots. Thirteen kilometers (8 miles) south of Castries, it's narrow yet navigable by yachts of any size. Here, Admiral Rodney camouflaged his ships with palm leaves while lying in wait for French frigates. The shore, lined with palm trees, remains relatively unspoiled, although some building sites have been sold. It's a delightful spot for a picnic. A 24-hour ferry connects the bay's two sides.

Soufrière

The little fishing port of Soufrière, St. Lucia's second-largest settlement, is dominated by two pointed hills called **Petit Piton** and **Gros Piton**. The Pitons, two volcanic cones rising to over 738m (2,460 feet), have become the very symbol of St. Lucia. Formed of lava and rock, and once actively volcanic, they're now covered in green vegetation. Their sheer rise from the sea makes them a landmark visible for miles around, and waves crash at their bases. It's recommended that you attempt to climb only Gros Piton, but doing so requires the permission of the **Forest and Lands Department** (☎ 758-450-2231; 758-450-2375, ext. 316 or 317) and the company of a knowledgeable guide.

Near Soufrière lies the famous drive-in volcano, **Mount Soufrière**, a rocky lunar landscape of bubbling mud and craters seething with sulfur. You literally drive your car into a millions-of-years-old crater and then get out and walk between the sulfur springs and pools of hissing steam. Entrance costs \$2.80 per person and includes the services of your guide, who will point out the blackened waters, among the few of their kind in the Caribbean. Hours are daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Call the Soufrière Development Foundation (☎ **758-459-7200**) for more information.

Nearby are the **Diamond Mineral Baths** (☎ **758-452-4759**) in the **Diamond Botanical Gardens**. Deep in the lush tropical gardens is the Diamond Waterfall, one of the geological attractions of the island. Created from water bubbling up from sulfur springs, the waterfall changes colors (from yellow to black to green to gray) several times a day. The baths were constructed in 1784 on the orders of Louis XVI, whose doctors told him these waters were similar in mineral content to the waters at Aix-les-Bains; they were intended to provide recuperative effects for French soldiers fighting in the West Indies. The baths have an average temperature of 41°C (106°F). For a cost between \$3.70 and \$5.55, depending on the degree of privacy, you can bathe and try out the recuperative effects for yourself.

From Soufrière in the Southwest, the road winds toward **Fond St-Jacques**, where you'll have a good view of mountains and villages as you cut through St. Lucia's **Cape Moule-Chique** tropical rain forest. You'll also see the **Barre de l'Isle Trail**, a 1.6km (1-mile) long trail that divides the eastern and western parts of St. Lucia. It offers four lookout points that provide panoramic views of the finest reserve that envelops it; you can see the Atlantic on one side and the Caribbean Sea on the other.

Guided tours

St. Lucia is difficult terrain to traverse on your own. Guided tours not only make it easy for you, but take you to the most spectacular sights, which you may not locate as easily on your own

Helicopter tours

St. Lucia Helicopters (☎ **758-453-6950**; www.stluciahelicopters.com) offers the island's most dramatic sightseeing. The ten-minute North Trip, costing \$55 per person, flies you over Castries, the major resort hotels, the elegant Cap Estate homes, Pigeon Point, Rodney Bay, and the more turbulent Atlantic Coast. The longer, 20-minute South Tour, costing \$95 per passenger, flies over Castries, the banana plantations, beautiful Marigot Bay, fishing villages, the lush rain forest, the Pitons, the Soufrière volcano, and even remote waterfalls, rivers, and lush valleys.

Nature tours

St. Lucia Heritage Tours (☎ **758-451-6220**; www.heritagetoursslucia.com) tailors trips to personal requirements and keeps its groups small. No

other outfitter puts you as close to nature as Heritage. Tours, costing from \$65 per person, take you to remote parts of the island that the average vacationer misses, including a waterfall on private lands. The emphasis is on off-the-beaten-track discoveries such as a plantation house from the 1800s. Call for reservations.

Bike tours

Bike St. Lucia, Anse Chastanet, Soufrière (☎ 758-451-2453; www.bikestlucia.com), is a trailblazing outfitter that penetrates deep into the lushness of the island along 19km (12 miles) of bike trails that date from the plantation era's beginnings in the 1700s. These unique tours accommodate both the first-time biker and the experienced rider. The most challenging ride, Tinker's Trail, was designed with the help of world champion biker, Tinker Juarez. Along the way, bikers pass numerous French colonial ruins and luxuriant fruit trees, including mango, guava, cocoa, and breadfruit, plus plenty of wild orchids. Highlights of the bike trips, costing from \$60 to \$100 per person, include a picnic lunch and a swim in a river or at the beach. About a quarter of the trips (4.8km/3 miles) are by bike, the rest in your trusty hiking boots. The outfitter provides all gear.

Keeping Active

St. Lucia's chief adventure for the active vacationer is in hiking through its lush rain forests on so-called jungle tours. The island also offers some first-rate golf, even though it can't really compete with the courses on such islands as Puerto Rico or Barbados.

Hiking through lush forests

A tropical rain forest covers a large area in the southern half of St. Lucia, and the **St. Lucia Forest and Lands Department** (☎ 758-450-2231, 758-450-2375, ext. 316 or 317) manages it wisely. This forest reserve divides the western and eastern halves of the island. The most popular of the several trails available is the **Barre de l'Isle Trail**, located almost in the center of St. Lucia, southeast of Marigot Bay; the trail is fairly easy, and even children can handle it. Four panoramic lookout points offer dramatic views of the sea where the Atlantic and the Caribbean meet. It takes about an hour to walk this 2km (1-mile-long) trail, which lies about a 30-minute ride from Castries. You can usually arrange guided hikes through the major hotels or through the Forest and Lands Department.

For rain-forest hikes, **Jungle Tours**, Cas-en-Bas/Gros Islet (☎ 758-450-0434), is the best outfitter, offering both an easy tour (a short walk) and a trail of intermediate challenge, lasting 1½ hours both ways. On the latter tour, participants imitate Tarzan by climbing down a rope. Many other tours, including a private beach tour along the wild Atlantic Coast, are available. Costs range from \$25 to \$80 per person, the latter including a buffet lunch.

Teeing off in St. Lucia

The only public golf course on the island lies in the northern district within Cap Estate. Part of **St. Lucia's Golf and Country Club** (☎ 758-450-9905), it offers an 18-hole, 6,202m (6,815-yard), par-72 championship course that's a challenge to both serious and recreational golfers. The course is the design of John Ponko, who trained with the fabled golf architect Robert Trent Jones, Sr. On-site is a clubhouse and a pro shop, where club rentals are available for \$20. Greens fees are \$95 for 18 holes or \$70 for 9 holes. The course offers no caddies — carts only. Reservations are necessary, and hours are from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.

Horsing around in St. Lucia

St. Lucia offers a variety of trail rides, from inland scenic rides through the countryside to beach picnics at Cas-en-Bas. **Trim's National Riding Stable**, north of Castries in Cas-en-Bas, Gros Islet (☎ 758-450-8273), is St. Lucia's oldest riding establishment. Its activities range from trail rides to beach tours to horse-drawn carriage tours of **Pigeon Island**. Rides begin at \$35 for an hour, rising to \$45 for two hours, or \$60 for a three-hour beach ride with a picnic.

Having a ball with tennis



The best place for tennis on the island is the **St. Lucia Racquet Club**, adjacent to Club St. Lucia (☎ 758-450-0551) on the very northern tip of the island. This club is one of the finest tennis facilities in the Lesser Antilles. Seven illuminated courts are maintained in state-of-the-art condition. You must reserve 24 hours in advance. Guests of the hotel play for free; nonguests pay \$20 for a full-day pass. A good pro shop is on-site, where tennis racquets rent for \$7.40 per hour.

The **Jalousie Hilton**, at Soufrière (☎ 758-459-7666), has a good program. Vernon Lewis, the top-ranked player in St. Lucia, is the pro. You'll find four brand-new Laykold tennis courts (three lit for night play). Hotel guests play for free (though they pay for lessons). Nonguests can play for \$20 per hour. Because the hotel has just four courts, reserving in advance is best.

Shopping the Local Stores

Most of the shopping is in **Castries**, where the principal streets are William Peter Boulevard and Bridge Street. Many stores will sell you goods at duty-free prices (providing you don't take the merchandise with you but have it delivered to the airport or cruise dock). You can find good (but not remarkable) deals when buying bone china, jewelry, perfume, watches, liquor, and crystal.

Built for the cruise-ship passenger, **Pointe Seraphine**, in Castries, has the best collection of shops on the island, along with offices for car rentals, organized taxi service (for sightseeing), a bureau de change, a philatelic

bureau, an information center, and international phones. Cruise ships dock right at the shopping center. Under red roofs in a Spanish-style setting, the complex requires that you present a cruise pass or an airline ticket to the shopkeeper when purchasing goods. Visitors can take away their purchases, except liquor and tobacco, which stores deliver to the airport. The center is open in winter, Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.; off-season, Monday to Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The shopping center is also open when cruise ships are in port. The following shops may strike your fancy:

- ✔ **Little Switzerland** (☎ 758-452-7587) sells a broad-based but predictable array of luxury goods. Prices of the porcelain, crystal, perfume, and jewelry are usually around 25 percent lower than on the North American mainland; wise shoppers should be alert to special promotions.
- ✔ **Colombian Emeralds** (☎ 758-453-7721), although it can't compete with the inventory at Little Switzerland, has a more diverse selection of watches, gemstones, and gold chains. Of special value are the watches, which sometimes sell for up to 40 percent less than equivalent retail prices in North America.
- ✔ **Studio Images** (☎ 758-452-6883) offers designer fragrances, including some exotic locally made concoctions, often 20 to 40 percent lower than U.S. prices. The store also carries the latest Sony electronics, leather accessories from Ted Lapidus, Samsonite luggage, and a wide collection of souvenirs.

At **Noah's Arkade**, Jeremie Street (☎ 758-452-2523), many of the Caribbean handicrafts and gifts are routine tourist items, but you'll often find something interesting if you browse around: local straw place mats, baskets, rugs, wall hangings, maracas, shell necklaces, locally made bowls, dolls dressed in banana leaves, and warri boards (from an old game played by slaves, akin to checkers). Additional branches are at Hewanorra International Airport and the Pointe Seraphine duty-free shopping malls.

On Gros Islet Highway, 3km (2 miles) north of Castries, **Gablewoods Mall** contains three restaurants and one of the island's densest concentrations of shops. At **Sunshine Bookshop** (☎ 758-452-3222), you can buy works by Caribbean authors, especially the books of the poet Derek Walcott, St. Lucia's Nobel Laureate.

Bagshaws, La Toc Road, just outside Castries (☎ 758-452-2139), is the leading island hand-printer of silk-screen designs. They incorporate the birds (look for the St. Lucia parrot), butterflies, and flowers of St. Lucia into their original designs. The highlights are an extensive line of vibrant prints on linen, clothing, and beachwear for both men and women, and the best T-shirt collection on St. Lucia. At **La Toc Studios** (same number as above), you can view the printing process Tuesday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Caribelle Batik, Howelton House, 37 Old Victoria Rd., Morne Fortune (☎ 758-452-3785), a five-minute drive from Castries, is where you can watch St. Lucian artists creating intricate patterns and colors through the ancient art of batik. You can also purchase batik in cotton, rayon, and silk, made up in casual and beach clothing, plus wall hangings and other gift items. In the renovated Victorian-era building, the Dyehouse Bar and Terrace serves drinks.

Vincent Joseph Eudovic is a master artist and woodcarver whose sculptures have gained increasing fame. You can view and purchase his work at **Eudovic Art Studio**, Goodlands, Morne Fortune (☎ 758-452-2747). He usually carves his imaginative, free-form sculptures from local tree roots, such as teak, mahogany, and red cedar. Ask to be taken to his private studio, where you'll see his remarkable creations.

Living It Up After Dark

St. Lucia doesn't have much of a nightlife besides the entertainment you find in hotels. In the winter, at least one hotel has a steel band or calypso music every night of the week. Otherwise, check to see what's happening at **Capone's** (☎ 758-452-0284) or the **Green Parrot** (☎ 758-452-3399), both in Castries.

Indies, at Rodney Bay (☎ 758-452-0727), is a split-floor, soundproof dance club with a large wooden dancing area and stage and a trio of bars. The DJs keep the joint jumping with both West Indian and international sounds, often American. The action gets going Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m.; the cover charge is \$7.40. Indies has a sort of rock and sports bar around the side of the building called the **Back Door**. Featuring alternative music and reggae, it serves snacks until 3 a.m.

One of the island's most action-packed dance clubs is **Folley**, Rodney Bay (☎ 758-450-0022), adjoining La Creole Restaurant. Patrons age 21 and up can enjoy an array of music from reggae to rock. Entrance is \$7.40.

If you want to go barhopping, begin at **Shamrocks Pub**, Rodney Bay (☎ 758-452-8725). This Irish-style pub is especially popular among boaters and gets really lively on weekends.

Among the dance clubs, islanders and visitors favor **Late Lime**, Reduit Beach (☎ 758-452-0761). A DJ plays dance music on Saturday. **The Chalet**, Rodney Bay (☎ 758-450-0022), near La Creole Restaurant, lies at Rodney Bay Marina, luring dancing feet to its wild disco nights. You'll hear some of the best zouk and salsa here.

At Marigot Bay, where the filming of the 1967 version of *Doctor Doolittle* starring Rex Harrison took place, the memory is perpetuated at **Doolittle's**, part of the Marigot Beach Club Hotel (☎ 758-451-4974), lying 15km (9 miles) south of Castries. The Marigot Bay ferry takes you

to the palm-studded peninsula of the resort; tickets cost \$1.85. On Saturday nights, a lavish seafood and barbecue buffet and a steel band make Doolittle's the best place to be on the island. You can come here for drinks (try the Singapore Slings) or dishes like chunky pumpkin soup, jerk chicken, or lobster and coconut shrimp Creole.

In the center of Rodney Bay is **Charlie's** (☎ 758-458-0565), which opened in 2004. It has an imported Italian chef and brings in piano players from both Britain and the States to entertain the crowd.

Fast Facts: St. Lucia

Area Code

The area code is **758**.

ATMs

ATMs are located at all bank branches, transportation centers, and shopping malls. Two of the most central banks are in Castries: the Bank of Nova Scotia, William Peter Boulevard (☎ 758-452-2100), and the National Commercial Bank of St. Lucia, Bridge Street (☎ 758-456-6000).

Baby Sitters

Your hotel probably can arrange this service for you at the cost of \$8 to \$10 an hour.

Currency Exchange

St. Lucia's official monetary unit is the Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC\$), which is pegged at EC \$2.70 per U.S. dollar. Because the Yankee coin is widely accepted, most visitors don't find it necessary to exchange U.S. dollars for EC dollars.

Doctors

Check with your hotel for a referral.

Embassies & Consulates

St. Lucia has no American embassy or consulate. The British High Commission is located at N.I.S. Building, Waterfront, Castries (☎ 758-452-2482).

Emergencies

Call the police at ☎ 999. For an ambulance or in case of fire, call ☎ 911.

Hospitals

Both St. Jude's Hospital, Vieux Fort (☎ 758-454-6041), and Victoria Hospital, Hospital Road, Castries (☎ 758-452-2421), have 24-hour emergency rooms.

Information

See the Appendix for helpful Web sites and locations of local tourist offices.

Internet Access

Use the services available at your hotel.

Newspapers/Magazines

Major U.S. newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Miami Herald* are flown in. On island, you can pick up a copy of the *St. Lucia Mirror* to find out what's going on.

Pharmacies

The best is M&C Drugstore, Bridge Street, in Castries (☎ 758-458-8147), open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Police

Call ☎ 999.

Post Office

The general post office, on Bridge Street in Castries, is open Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Restrooms

In Castries, you'll find public restrooms with running water adjacent to the cruise-ship terminals on Place Carenage, and also adjacent to the public markets on Jeremie Street. But other than that, you'll have to duck into one of the island's many bars, hotels, and restaurants, each of which is required, by St. Lucian law, to admit members of the general public (who may or may not be a patron of their establishment) into their restrooms. Recognizing the way passersby have, to some degree, adopted the restrooms of many bars and restaurants, many owners position their restrooms conveniently close to the main entrance.

Safety

St. Lucia has its share of crime, like every other place these days. Use common sense and protect yourself and your valuables. If you've got it, don't flaunt it! Don't pick up hitchhikers if you're driving around the island. Narcotic drugs are illegal, and possessing or selling them could lead to stiff fines or jail.

Smoking

Smoking policies are left to the discretion of the individual establishments, and most restaurants have designated nonsmoking sections within their restaurants and bars. With so many open-air establishments, the natural ventilation of the trade winds helps resolve conflicts.

Taxes

The government imposes an 8 percent occupancy tax on hotel rooms, and you have to pay a \$21 departure tax (included in your airfare) at either airport. Children under 12 are exempt from the departure tax.

Taxis

Taxis are readily available at airports, where the harbor cruise ships arrive, and in front of major hotels. No central number exists; however, your hotel desk keeps a list of the private numbers of cabbies to call if one isn't waiting outside. Although taxis aren't metered, most island cabbies are members of a taxi cooperative that agrees to charge standard rates: Castries to Marigot Bay in the South, \$25 to \$30; Castries to Soufrière, \$70; or Castries to Rodney Bay, \$18 to \$20.

Weather Updates

Check www.weather.com for updates.