

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

St. Maarten/St. Martin and its neighbors Anguilla and St. Barts offer something for everyone: from pristine beaches and duty-free jewelry to amazing outdoors adventures and nocturnal life on the wild side. You can stay in charming Creole cottages or world-class resorts. And you can dine very well indeed at casual beach barbecues or grand temples of gastronomy. Whatever your tastes and budget, in this chapter I'll guide you to the best these beautiful islands have to offer.

1 Frommer's Favorite Experiences

- **Day-Tripping to Offshore Islands:** Take a trip to a real-life desert-island paradise when you visit one of the tiny offshore gems on St. Martin and Anguilla. Here you can snorkel in gin-clear waters, sip rum punches, and eat lobster and barbecue fresh off the grill. There are few more relaxing diversions than wading in the gentle lagoon at idyllic Îlet Pinel (Pinel Island) near St. Martin's Orient Beach, or taking similar day trips off-island to Anguilla's Scilly Cay, Sandy Island, and Prickly Pear. See p. 94 and 155.
- **Watching children dip their toes in the calm, clear waters at Le Galion Beach, St. Martin:** It's not called the "children's beach" for nothing. Gentle waves lap a white-sand beach, where the shallow waters seem to go on forever. It's the perfect place for kids to learn the delights of swimming in the sea. See p. 96.
- **Becoming a High-Flying Yachtsman, St. Maarten:** If you've ever dreamed of racing in an America's Cup yachting competition, here's your chance. St. Maarten's 12-Metre Challenge lets you race real America's Cup boats in one of four regattas a day.

St. Maarten/St. Martin, Anguilla & St. Barts

Dog I.

Prickley Pear Keys

ANGUILLA
(U.K.)

The Valley

SAINT-MARTIN
(FRANCE)

Marigot

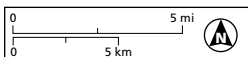
Orleans

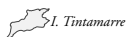
SINT MAARTEN
(NETHERLANDS)

Phillipsburg

C A R I B B E A N

S E A





A T L A N T I C

O C E A N



- **People-Watching at a Sidewalk Cafe:** Find yourself a prime seat on the Marigot waterfront, along the Front Street/Great Bay Boardwalk in Philipsburg (where leviathan cruise ships make the fishing dinghies look like toy boats), or in St. Barts' fairy-tale harbor town, Gustavia.
- **Dining in Grand Case, St. Martin:** This tiny fishing village has an appealing ramshackle style. But don't let its languorous style fool you: The "Gourmet Capital of the Caribbean" has an amazing concentration of top-notch eateries on one beachfront strip. See p. 76.
- **Visiting Loterie Farm, St. Martin:** Head over to this nature reserve to handle the zip lines or hike through virgin rainforest, followed by a meal at the lovely Hidden Forest Cafe. See p. 87.
- **Breakfast at La Samanna, St. Martin:** The view is extraordinary: You're high above Baie Longue, its white sands caressing the curve of the bay. The food isn't bad either; a grand buffet of breakfast favorites plus fresh island fruits and juices. See p. 64.
- **Horseback Riding, St. Maarten/St. Martin:** You actually dip into the water astride your horse during 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. 100.
- **Chilling in an Anguilla Beach Shack:** No place gets the beach-bar culture as right as Anguilla, where the vibe is laid-back, the food tasty, the music toe-tapping, and the setting sublime. It'll cure whatever ails you. See p. 152.
- **Dining Out in Anguilla:** You will not have a bad meal here, I guarantee it, whether you dine in one of the island's highly touted restaurants or at a barbecue buffet under the stars. See p. 147.
- **Kitesurfing in the Grand Cul-de-Sac on St. Barts:** This stretch of water is perfect for kitesurfing. It's a thrill to do, and a thrill to watch, as the billowing kites skim the clouds and the boards skate the glassy sea. See p. 190.
- **Beach-hopping in St. Barts:** Everyone does it, and they know *how* to do it. Grab a beach umbrella (your hotel can provide one for you)—shade is hard to find on St. Bart's beaches—towels, beach book, and delicious-smelling Ligne St. Barth coconut oil, and prepare for a day of luxuriating on some of the world's finest beaches. See p. 188.

- **Shopping in St. Barts:** When it comes to shopping, St. Barts wins the prize hands-down for the best in the Caribbean—it's Paris by the sea. And even better: It's duty- and tax-free. You can find stylish, high-quality clothing in even the most basic-looking shops. The pharmacies are shopping havens, where the famously exquisite French skincare lines and toiletries are a pleasure to browse. Even the grocery stores are a marvel, with imported French cheeses, pates, wine, and—ooh-la-la!—the French version of canned ravioli. See p. 191.

2 The Best Beaches

- **Orient Bay, St. Martin:** This happening strand may be clothing-optional, but it also happens to be a beautiful beach. If you're looking for water-sports action and a lively beach-bar scene, this is the place to find it. See p. 84.
- **Baie Longue, St. Martin:** The longest and perhaps most private stretch of sand on St. Martin, and a fine place to spot celebrities staying at La Samanna. See p. 92.
- **Baie de l'Embouchure/Galion Beach, St. Martin:** This 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. 96.
- **Happy Bay, St. Martin:** 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. 95.
- **Pinel Island, St. Martin:** This tiny offshore cay makes for a wonderful day trip with a perfect lagoon to paddle around in. See p. 94.
- **Cupecoy Beach, St. Maarten:** This Dutch-side beach boasts gorgeous multihued cliffs pocked with caves, and the occasional green flash sighting at sunset. See p. 90.
- **Dawn Beach, St. Maarten:** The views of St. Barts, great beach bars, excellent windsurfing, and superb snorkeling enchant at any time of day. See p. 92.
- **Shoal Bay East, Anguilla:** Not to be confused with Shoal Bay West, this beach offers both rollicking activity and seclusion, with beach bars lining one section and great snorkeling on its less-trafficked eastern flank. See p. 156.
- **Rendezvous Bay, Anguilla:** This picture-perfect beach curls and stretches its sands for nearly 3 miles—it's a great swimming beach. See p. 156.

- **Maundays Bay, Anguilla:** The prime beach for the Cap Juluca resort, Maundys Bay has calm, sparkling waters that are perfect for swimming and snorkeling. See p. 156.
- **St-Jean Beach, St. Barts:** This beach is split into two beaches by the Eden Rock hotel, but it's lovely nonetheless. It's just steps away from great shopping and dining. See p. 188.
- **Flamands Beach, St. Barts:** This is a long, wide beach with little commercial activity and that rarity on St. Barts: a shady grove of lantana palms. See p. 188.

3 The Best Places to Get Away from It All

- **Hôtel L'Esplanade**, Grand Case, St. Martin (☎ 590/87-06-55), is up on a bluff overlooking Grand Case and Grand Case beach, which you can see from your private terrace. This handsome hotel is pillowed in colorful flowers, and the rooms are utterly private and beautifully outfitted. You're just 5 minutes away from bustling Grand Case below, but this tranquil spot feels like a world apart. See p. 57.
- **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—and the beachfront setting is glorious. See p. 59.
- **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? See p. 179.
- **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. 181.

4 The Best Luxury Hotels

- **La Samanna**, Baie Longue, St. Martin (☎ 800/237-1236), is rare among resorts in its class (in both senses of the word), offering posh pampering with nary a hint of pretension. The

main restaurant is set high up over Baie Longue—an unbelievably beautiful setting. See p. 58.

- **Cap Juluca**, Maundays Bay, Anguilla (☎ 888/858-5822), is always at or near the top of everyone's "Best Of" lists. The Moroccan-themed digs, the beautiful landscaping, the wonderful rooms, and professional yet discreet service explain why it's a favorite of celebrities and captains of industry. But regular folks get the royal treatment, too. See p. 138.
- **Malliouhana**, Mead's Bay, Anguilla (☎ 800/835-0796), has a cooler look and ambience than Cap Juluca, but it's just as luxe. It has twin beaches, gorgeous landscaping, sublime food, a 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. 140.
- **CuisinArt**, Anguilla (☎ 264/498-2000), has a world-class beach, a lovely pool, a fabulous spa, and an amazing hydroponic farm, which supplies its on-site restaurants with fresh produce. It's a sunny, comfortable, well-managed resort, with service and amenities that just get better and better. See p. 139.
- **Eden Rock**, Baie de St-Jean, St. Barts (☎ 877/563-7105), defines the old hotel mantra "location, location, location," its exquisite lodgings 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. See p. 173.
- **Hotel Guanahani & Spa**, Grand Cul-de-Sac, St. Barts (☎ 590/27-66-60), is the ultimate spot to relax and unwind and let the pros pamper you. The vibrantly colored rooms are stuffed with state-of-the-art amenities, the beach looks out on beautiful Grand Cul-de-Sac bay, and the food is terrific. The capper? All this luxury is yours without pomp or attitude. See p. 174.
- **Hôtel St. Barth Isle de France**, Baie des Flamands, St. Barts (☎ 590/27-61-81), is an award-winning boutique hotel (35 rooms) that is both luxurious and supremely comfortable. It opens right onto glorious Flamands beach. See p. 176.

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 mediocre meal. See p. 68.

- **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 fun and inventive. See p. 68.
- **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 flavorful blend of classic French and Creole fare. See p. 78.
- **Spiga**, Grand Case, St. Martin (☎ 590/52-47-83), proves that Grand Case (and St. Martin) can cook Italian with equal panache. From tuna carpaccio to tiramisu, everything is perfection. See p. 79.
- **Lolos**, St. Martin/St. Maarten, is a term for the basic outdoor shacks dishing out heaping helpings of heavenly Creole fare at unbelievably fair prices. The biggest concentration lies along the beach in Grand Case. See p. 77.
- **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, Michel Rostang. The beachfront setting is simple yet stylish and the wine selection unparalleled. See p. 140.
- **Blanchards**, Anguilla (☎ 264/497-6100), ranks high on everyone's list of top 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. See p. 148.
- **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. See p. 149.
- **CuisinArt Barbecue Buffets**, Anguilla (☎ 264/498-2000), will please both gourmands and the ultra-ravenous. It's an all-you-can-eat outdoor extravaganza, with grilled lobster, ribs, and chicken; fantastic sides (with produce from CuisinArt's own hydroponic farm); and scores of rich desserts—all of it unbelievably tasty. A string band will have your toes tapping. See p. 140.

- **Le Gaïac**, Anse de Toiny, St. Barts (☎ 590/27-88-88), in the ultra-plush Le Toiny hotel, may be the last bastion 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 Sunday brunches. See p. 188.
- **Le Sapotillier**, Gustavia, St. Barts (☎ 590/27-60-28), now has Stéphane Guidal as its hot chef, and his credentials are impeccable—among other apprenticeships, Guidal worked with Alain Ducasse in Paris. Le Sapotillier remains a memorable fine-dining experience, where you spend the evening on the candlelit patio under a magnificent sapodilla tree or inside the clapboard-covered Creole cottage. See p. 184.

6 The Best Shopping

- **Front Street** in Philipsburg is a mind-boggling display of rampant consumerism. And it's all duty-free, from luxury watches to diamonds to Delft china. See p. 105.
- **Le West Indies Mall** and **Plaza Caraïbes** in Marigot feature the haute of couture, well, at any rate prettily priced *prêt-à-porter* and accessories from such design legends as Cartier and Hermès. See p. 106.
- **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 delectably infused, charmingly bottled rums, which for my money (or yours) beats the more famous Guavaberry liqueurs for flavor. See p. 115.
- **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. 192.
- **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. 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. 120.
- **Bliss**, St. Maarten (☎ 599/545-3936), sounds like a spa, but it's actually Bernie's equally sizzling neighbor, another multi-purpose beachfront nightclub-cum-restaurant-cum-live-music-venue. See p. 117.
- **Casino Royale**, St. Maarten (☎ 599/545-2590), 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**. See p. 126.
- **Celine**, St. Maarten (☎ 599/545-3961), and her skipper/builder, Neil Roebert, offer a unique experience. During Celine's Lagoon Pub Crawl, you sail to three Simpson Bay hot spots for drinks and appetizers. See p. 98.
- **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, Sunset is famous for watching the planes take off and land right above your head. See p. 121.
- **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. 122.
- **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. 152.
- **Dune Preserve**, Rendezvous Bay, Anguilla (☎ 264/497-2660), is a multi-tiered beachfront bar that was crafted out of old boats and beach salvage. It's got lots of interesting nooks and crannies and now serves food from one of the island's best cooks, Dale Carty. It's owned by Anguilla's best-known singer, "Bankie" Banx, and jammed when he performs. See p. 153.
- **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. 194.

- **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. See p. 194.