

# The Best of the Caribbean

In the Caribbean, you can hike through national parks and scuba dive along underwater mountains. But if your idea of the perfect island vacation is to plunk yourself down on the sands with a frosted drink in hand, you can do that, too. Whether you want a veranda with a view of the sea or a plantation house set in a field of sugar cane, this chapter will help you choose the vacation that best suits your needs.

For a thumbnail portrait of each island, see “The Islands in Brief,” in chapter 2.

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## 1 THE BEST BEACHES

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Good beaches with soul-warming sun, crystal-clear waters, and fragrant sea air can be found on virtually every island of the Caribbean, with the possible exceptions of Saba (which has rocky shores) and Dominica (where the few beaches have dramatically black sands that absorb the hot sun).

- **Shoal Bay** (Anguilla): This luscious stretch of silvery sand helped put Anguilla on the world-tourism map. Snorkelers are drawn to the schools of iridescent fish that dart among the coral gardens offshore. You can take the trail walk from Old Ta to little-known Katouche Beach, which provides perfect snorkeling and is also a prime site for a beach picnic under shade trees. See chapter 3.
- **Antigua:** Legend has it that there is a beach here for every day of the year. Antiguan claim, with justifiable pride, that their two best are Dickenson Bay, in the northwest corner of the island, and Half Moon Bay, which stretches for a white sandy mile along the eastern coast. Most major hotels open directly onto a good beach, so chances are good yours will be built on or near a strip of sand. See chapter 4.
- **Palm Beach** (Aruba): This superb white-sand beach put Aruba on the tourist map. Several publications, including *Condé Nast Traveler*, have hailed it as one of the 12 best beaches in the world. It's likely to be crowded in winter, but for swimming, sailing, or fishing, it's idyllic. See chapter 5.
- **The Gold Coast** (Barbados): Some of the finest beaches in the Caribbean lie along the so-called Gold Coast of Barbados (now often called the Platinum Coast), site of some of the swankiest deluxe hotels in the Northern Hemisphere. Our favorites include Paynes Bay, Brandon's Beach, Paradise Beach, and Brighton Beach—all open to the public. See chapter 6.
- **Cane Garden Bay** (Tortola, British Virgin Islands): One of the Caribbean's most spectacular stretches, Cane Garden Bay has 2km (1¼ miles) of white sand and is a jogger's favorite. It's a much better choice than the more

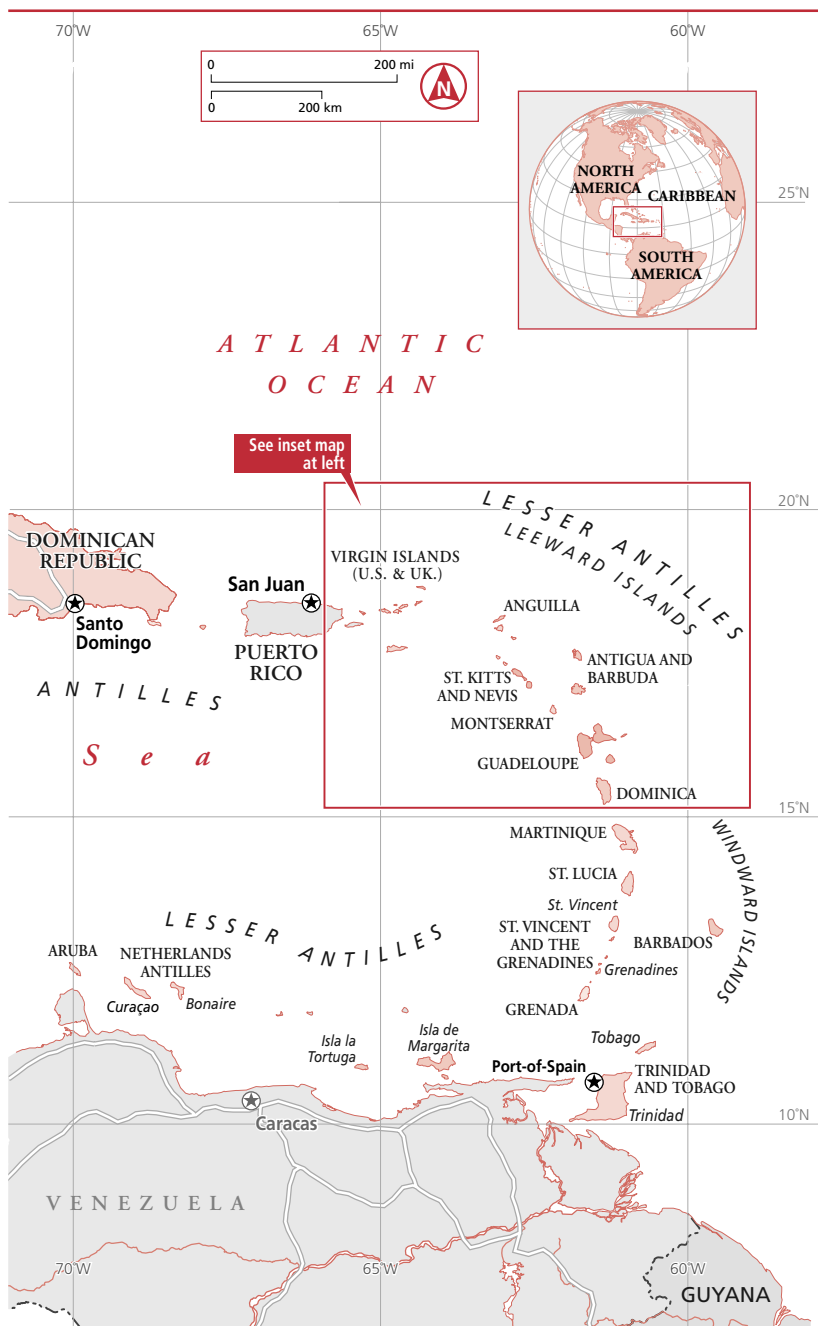
## 6 The Caribbean Islands

THE BEST OF THE CARIBBEAN

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THE BEST BEACHES





crowded Magens Bay beach on neighboring St. Thomas. See chapter 8.

- **Seven Mile Beach** (Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands): It's really about 9km (5½ miles) long, but who's counting? Lined with condos and plush resorts, this beach is known for its array of watersports and its translucent aquamarine waters. Australian pines dot the background, and the average winter temperature of the water is a perfect 80°F (27°C). See chapter 9.
- **The Dominican Republic:** There are two great options here: the beaches of resort-riddled Punta Cana at the easternmost tip of the island, or those at Playa Dorada along the northern coast, which fronts the Atlantic. Punta Cana is a 30km (19-mile) strip of oyster-white sand set against a backdrop of palm trees, and Playa Dorada is filled with beaches of white or beige sands. See chapter 12.
- **Grand Anse Beach** (Grenada): This 3km (1¾-mile) beach is reason enough to go to Grenada. Although the island has some 45 beaches, most with white sand, this is the fabled one, and rightly so. There's enough space and so few visitors that you'll probably find a spot just for yourself. The sugary sands of Grand Anse extend into deep waters far offshore. Most of the island's best hotels are within walking distance. See chapter 13.
- **Seven Mile Beach** (Negril, Jamaica): In the northwestern section of the island, this beach stretches for 11km (6¾ miles) along the sea and is backed by some of the most hedonistic resorts in the Caribbean. Not for the conservative, the beach also contains some nudist sections, along with bare-all Booby Cay offshore. See chapter 15.
- **Diamond Beach** (Martinique): This bright-white beach stretches for about 10km (6¼ miles), much of it developed. It faces a rocky offshore island, Diamond Rock, which has uninhabited shores. See chapter 16.
- **Luquillo Beach** (Puerto Rico): Luquillo, 48km (30 miles) east of San Juan, is a vast sandy beach opening onto a crescent-shaped bay edged by a coconut grove. Coral reefs protect the crystal-clear lagoon from the often rough Atlantic waters that can buffet the northern coast. Much photographed because of its white sands, Luquillo has a snack bar, picnic areas with changing rooms, lockers, and showers. See chapter 17.
- **St-Jean Beach** (St. Barthélemy): A somewhat narrow golden-sand beach, St-Jean is the gem of the island, reminiscent of the French Riviera (though you're supposed to keep your top on). Reefs protect the beach, making it ideal for swimming. See chapter 19.
- **St. Maarten/St. Martin:** Take your pick. This island, divided about equally between France and the Netherlands, has 39 white sandy beaches. Our favorites include Dawn Beach, Mullet Bay Beach, Maho Bay Beach, and Great Bay Beach on the Dutch side. Orient Beach is another standout—not because of its sands, but because of the nudists. See chapter 23.
- **Canouan** (The Grenadines): Most of the other beaches recommended in this section may be crowded in winter. But if you're looking for an idyllic, secluded stretch of perfect white sand, head for the remote and tiny island of Canouan, one of the pearls of The Grenadines, a string of islands lying south of its parent, St. Vincent. You'll have the beaches and the crystal-clear waters to yourself, even in winter. See chapter 24.
- **Tobago:** For your Robinson Crusoe holiday in the southern Caribbean, head to the little island of Tobago. Even Trinidadians fly here on weekends to enjoy the beach life. It doesn't get any better than Pigeon Point, a long coral beach on the northwestern coast. Other good beaches on Tobago include Back

Bay (site of an old coconut plantation) and Man-O-War Bay, with a beautiful natural harbor and long stretch of sand. See chapter 25.

- **Grace Bay Beach** (Providenciales, Turks and Caicos): These 20km (12 miles) of pale sands are the pride of Provo; the beach has been named the “World’s Leading Beach” at the World Travel Awards for 4 years running. It’s such a spectacular setting that increasing numbers of resorts have sprung up along the shore. A couple of miles out from the

northern shore, the beach is fringed by a reef with fabulous snorkeling. See chapter 26.

- **Trunk Bay** (St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands): Protected by the U.S. National Park Service, this beach is one of the Caribbean’s most popular. A favorite with cruise-ship passengers, it’s known for its underwater snorkeling trail, where markers guide you along the reef just off the white sands; you’re sure to see a gorgeous rainbow of tropical fish. See chapter 27.

## 2 THE BEST SNORKELING

The Virgin Islands offer some particularly outstanding sites, but there are many other great places for snorkeling in the Caribbean.

- **Antigua:** This is a snorkeler’s dream. Most of its lovely beaches open onto clear, calm waters populated by rainbow-hued tropical fish. The marine life offshore is particularly dense, including colorful sea anemones. The rich types of different elk and brain coral make snorkeling particularly rewarding. See chapter 4.
- **Bonaire Marine Park** (Bonaire): All the attributes that make Bonaire a world-class diving destination apply to its snorkeling, too. Snorkelers can wade from the shores off their hotels to the reefs and view an array of coral and colorful fish. In particular, the reefs just off Klein Bonaire receive rave reviews. See chapter 7.
- **Stingray City** (Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands): Stingray City is an easy 4m (13-ft.) diving site that can also be seen while snorkeling. It’s an extraordinary experience to meet the dozens of tame, gentle stingrays that glide around you in the warm, crystal-clear waters. See chapter 9.
- **Curaçao Underwater Marine Park** (Curaçao): In contrast to Curaçao’s arid

terrain, the marine life that rings the island is rich and spectacular. The best-known snorkeling sites, in the Curaçao Underwater Marine Park, stretch for 20km (12 miles) along Curaçao’s southern coastline, and there are many other highly desirable sites as well. Sunken ships, gardens of hard and soft coral, and millions of fish are a snorkeler’s treat. See chapter 10.

- **St. Martin:** The best snorkeling on the island lies on the French side, where the government religiously protects the calm waters, which are populated with schools of brilliantly colored fish. Find a tiny cove and explore the shallow reefs along its shores, especially in the north-eastern underwater nature reserve. See chapter 23.
- **The Grenadines:** Every island here offers great snorkeling possibilities right off magnificent white-sand beaches. In most places you’ll have the waters to yourself. One of the best is the reef stretching for 1.5km (1 mile) along the island of Canouan, where waters are filled with beautiful brain coral and vibrant fish. The snorkeling is also good at Palm Island and Petit St. Vincent. See chapter 24.
- **Tobago:** Enormous colonies of marine life inhabit the shallow, sun-dappled

waters off the coastline facing Venezuela. Buccoo Reef on Tobago is especially noteworthy, and many local entrepreneurs offer snorkeling cruises. See chapter 25.

- **Provo** (Turks and Caicos): Although this island is known primarily as one of the world's best dive sites, it also provides a number of snorkeling possibilities. The government has established snorkel trails at Smith's Reef and Bight Reef, right off of Provo's spectacular Grace Bay Beach. These reefs provide easy access into the fragile but stunningly beautiful world of coral gardens, the most dramatic in the vast area immediately south of The Bahamas. See chapter 26.
- **Buck Island** (St. Croix, U.S.V.I.): More than 250 species of fish, as well as a variety of sponges, corals, and crustaceans, have been found at this 340-hectare (840-acre) island and reef system, 3km (1¾ miles) off St. Croix's north shore. The reef is strictly protected by the U.S. National Park Service. See chapter 27.
- **Cane Bay** (St. Croix): One of the best diving and snorkeling sites on St. Croix

is off this breezy north-shore beach. On a clear day, you can swim out 140m (459 ft.) and see the Cane Bay Wall that drops off dramatically to deep waters below. Multicolored fish, elkhorn, and brain coral abound. See chapter 27.

- **Trunk Bay** (St. John): Trunk Bay's self-guided 205m-long (672-ft.) trail has large underwater signs that identify species of coral and other items of interest. The beach has showers, changing rooms, equipment rentals, and a lifeguard. See chapter 27.
- **Haulover Bay** (St. John): A favorite with locals, this small bay is rougher than Leinster and often deserted. The snorkeling is dramatic, with ledges, walls, nooks, and sandy areas set close together. At this spot, only about 180m (590 ft.) of land separates the Atlantic Ocean from the Caribbean Sea. See chapter 27.
- **Coki Point Beach** (St. Thomas, U.S.V.I.): On the north shore of St. Thomas, this beach offers excellent snorkeling, especially around the coral ledges near Coral World's underwater tower, a favorite with cruise-ship passengers. See chapter 27.

### 3 THE BEST DIVING

All the major islands offer diving trips, lessons, and equipment, but here are the top picks.

- **Bonaire:** The highly accessible reefs that surround Bonaire are pristine, and the island's environmentally conscious diving industry ensures they will remain that way. Created from volcanic eruptions, the island is an underwater mountain, with fringe reefs right off the beach of every hotel on any part of the island. See chapter 7.
- **Virgin Gorda** (B.V.I.): Many divers plan their entire vacations around exploring the famed wreck of the HMS

*Rhone*, off Salt Island. This royal mail steamer, which went down in 1867, is the most celebrated diving site in the Caribbean. See chapter 8.

- **Grand Cayman:** This is a world-class diving destination. There are 34 dive operators on Grand Cayman (with 5 more on Little Cayman, plus 3 on Cayman Brac). A full range of professional diving services is available, including equipment sales, rentals, and repairs; instruction at all levels; underwater photography; and video schools. See chapter 9.
- **Puerto Rico:** With the continental shelf surrounding it on three sides,

Puerto Rico has an abundance of coral reefs, caves, sea walls, and trenches for divers of all experience levels to explore. Mona Island, 64km (40 miles) west of the city of Mayagüez in western Puerto Rico, is the Caribbean version of the Galápagos Islands. Its waters are among the cleanest in Puerto Rico, with horizontal visibility at times exceeding 61m (200 ft.). In southern Puerto Rico, the continental shelf drops off precipitously several miles off the southern coast, producing a dramatic wall 32km (20 miles) long and teeming with marine life.

- **Saba:** Islanders can't brag about its beaches, but Saba is blessed with some of the Caribbean's richest marine life. It's one of the premier diving locations in the Caribbean, with 38 official diving sites. The unusual setting includes underwater lava flows, black sand, large strands of black coral, millions of fish, and underwater mountaintops submerged under 27m (89 ft.) of water. See chapter 18.
- **Turks and Caicos:** These islands provide a rich assortment of relatively unexplored underwater sites, including sea lanes where boaters and divers often

spot whales from January to March. A collection of unusual underwater wrecks includes the HMS *Endymion*, which sank during a storm in 1790. Miles of reefs house myriad kinds of colorful marine life. Right off Grand Turk, experienced divers love the many miles of "drop-off" diving, where the sea walls plunge into the uncharted depths of blue holes more than 2,100m (6,888 ft.) below sea level. As you descend, you'll see colonies of black coral, rare forms of anemone, purple sponges, stunning gorgonian, endless forms of coral, and thousands of fish. See chapter 26.

- **St. Croix:** Increasingly known as a top diving destination, St. Croix hasn't yet overtaken Grand Cayman but has a lot going for it. Beach dives, reef dives, wreck dives, nighttime dives, wall dives—they're all here. The highlight is the underwater trails of the national park at Buck Island, off St. Croix's mainland. Other desirable sites include the drop-offs and coral canyons at Cane Bay and Salt River. Davis Bay is the location of the 3,600m-deep (11,808-ft.) Puerto Rico Trench, the fifth-deepest body of water on earth. See chapter 27.

## 4 THE BEST SAILING

Virtually every large-scale hotel in the Caribbean provides small sailboats (most often Sunfish, Sailfish, and small, one-masted catamarans) for its guests. For larger craft, the almost-ideal sailing conditions in the Virgin Islands and The Grenadines come instantly to mind. These two regions offer many options for dropping anchor at secluded coves surrounded by relatively calm waters. Both areas are spectacular, but whereas the Virgin Islands have more dramatic, mountainous terrain, The Grenadines offer insights into island cultures little touched by the modern world.

Other places to sail in the Caribbean include Antigua, Barbados, St. Martin, and the French-speaking islands. But if you plan on a lot of sailing, know that the strongest currents and biggest waves are usually on the northern and eastern sides of most islands—the Atlantic (as opposed to the Caribbean) side.

- **The Grenadines:** Boating is a way of life in The Grenadines, partly because access to many of the tiny remote islands is difficult or impossible by airplane. One of the most prominent local charter agents is **Nicholson Yacht**

**Charters** (☎ 800/662-6066 in the U.S., or 617/661-0555; [www.yachtvacations.com](http://www.yachtvacations.com)), headquartered in nearby St. Vincent. On Bequia, Mustique, Petit St. Vincent, and Union Island, all the hotels can put you in touch with local entrepreneurs who rent sailing craft. See chapter 24 for more details.

- **The British Virgin Islands:** Perhaps because of their well-developed marina facilities (and those of the nearby U.S. Virgins), the Virgin Islands receive the lion's share of devoted yachties. The reigning capital for sailing is Tortola, the largest island of the British Virgins. On-site are about 300 well-maintained sailing craft available for bareboat rentals and perhaps 100 charter yachts. The largest of the Caribbean's yacht-chartering services is **The Moorings** (☎ 888/952-8420 or 284/494-2331; [www.moorings.com](http://www.moorings.com)). On the island of Virgin Gorda, in the British Virgin Islands, the best bet for both boat rentals and

accommodations, as well as for a range of instruction, is the **Bitter End Yacht Club** (☎ 800/872-2392 in the U.S., or 284/494-2746; [www.beyc.com](http://www.beyc.com)). The outfits in this paragraph are described more fully in chapter 8.

- **The U.S. Virgin Islands:** Some of the biggest charter business in the Caribbean is conducted on St. Thomas, especially at **American Yacht Harbor**, Red Hook (☎ 340/775-6454; [www.igy-americanyachtharbor.com](http://www.igy-americanyachtharbor.com)), which offers bareboat and fully crewed charters. Other reliable rental agents include **Charteryacht League**, at Flagship (☎ 800/524-2061 in the U.S., or 340/774-3944; [www.vicl.org](http://www.vicl.org)). On St. Croix, boating is less essential to the local economy than it is on St. Thomas or in the British Virgins, so if you're taking a Virgin Islands sailing trip, plan accordingly. The U.S. Virgin Islands are covered in chapter 27.

## 5 THE BEST GOLF COURSES

Some of the world's most famous golf architects, including Robert Trent Jones (both Jr. and Sr.), Pete Dye, and Gary Player, have designed challenging courses in the Caribbean.

- **Tierra del Sol Golf Course** (Aruba; ☎ 297/586-0978; [www.tierradelsol.com](http://www.tierradelsol.com)): Robert Trent Jones, Jr., has designed an 18-hole, par-71, 6,811-yard course that is one of the grandest in the southern Caribbean. On the northwest coast of this arid, cactus-studded island, the course takes in Aruba's indigenous flora, including the divi-divi tree. See p. 112.
- **Teeth of the Dog** and **The Links**, Casa de Campo (Dominican Republic; ☎ 809/523-8800): Teeth of the Dog is one of designer Pete Dye's masterpieces. Seven holes are set adjacent to the sea,

whereas the other 11 are confoundingly labyrinthine. The resort also has a second golf course, The Links, which some claim is even more difficult. See p. 276.

- **Golf de St-François** (Guadeloupe; ☎ 590/88-41-87): Six of its 18 holes are ringed with water traps, the winds are devilishly unpredictable, and the par is a sweat-inducing 71. This fearsome course displays the wit and skill of its designer, Robert Trent Jones, Sr. Most of the staff is multilingual, and because the course is owned by the local municipality, it's a lot less snobby than you might expect. See p. 348.
- **The Tryall Club** (Montego Bay, Jamaica; ☎ 876/956-5660): This is the finest golf course on an island known



for its tricky breezes. The site occupied by the Tryall Club was once the home of one of Jamaica's best-known sugar plantations, the only remnant of which is a ruined waterwheel. The promoters of Johnnie Walker Scotch, who know a lot about golfing, use this place for their most prestigious competition. In winter, the course is usually open only to guests of the Tryall Club. See p. 376.

- **Cinnamon Hill Ocean Course** (Rose Hall, Jamaica; ☎ 876/953-2650): This is one of the top five courses in the world, even though it faces tough competition in Montego Bay. The signature hole is 8, which doglegs onto a promontory and a green that thrusts about 180m (590 ft.) into the sea. The back 9, however, are the most scenic and most

challenging, rising into steep slopes and deep ravines on Mount Zion. See p. 375.

- **Four Seasons Resort Nevis** (Nevis; ☎ 800/332-3442 in the U.S., 800/268-6282 in Canada, or 869/469-1111): We consider this our personal favorite in all of the Caribbean. It was carved out of a coconut plantation and tropical rainforest in the 1980s, and its undulating beauty is virtually unequalled. Designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr., the course begins at sea level, rises to a point midway up the slopes of Mount Nevis, and then slants gracefully back down near the beachfront clubhouse. Electric carts carry golfers through a maze of well-groomed paths, some of which skirt steep ravines. See p. 554.

## 6 THE BEST TENNIS FACILITIES

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- **Curtain Bluff** (Antigua; ☎ 888/289-9898 in the U.S., or 268/462-8400): Small, select, and carefully run by people who love tennis, this is also the annual site of a well-known spring tournament. The courts are set in a low-lying valley. See p. 82.
- **Casa de Campo** (Dominican Republic; ☎ 800/877-3643 or 809/523-8698): The facilities here include 13 clay courts (10 are lit, and 2 are ringed with stadium seating), 4 all-weather Laykold courts, a resident pro, ball machines, and tennis pros who are usually available to play with guests. During mid-winter, residents and clients of Casa de Campo have first crack at court times. See p. 276.
- **Half Moon** (Montego Bay, Jamaica; ☎ 876/953-2211): This resort sprawls over hundreds of acres, with about a dozen tennis courts and at least four squash and/or racquetball courts.

Jamaica has a strong, British-based affinity for tennis, and Half Moon keeps the tradition alive. See p. 377.

- **The Buccaneer** (St. Croix; ☎ 800/255-3881 in the U.S., or 340/712-2100; www.thebuccaneer.com): Hailed as having the best tennis facilities in the Virgin Islands, this resort hosts several tournaments every year. There are eight all-weather Laykold courts, two of which are illuminated at night; there's also a pro shop. Nonguests can play here for a fee. See p. 751.
- **Wyndham Sugar Bay Resort & Spa** (St. Thomas; ☎ 877/999-3223 or 340/777-7100): This resort offers the first stadium tennis court in the U.S. Virgin Islands, with a capacity of 220 spectators. In addition, it has four Laykold courts, each of which is lit for night play. There's an on-site pro shop, and lessons are available. See p. 711.

## 7 THE BEST PLACES TO HONEYMOON

More and more couples are exchanging their vows in the Caribbean. Many resorts will arrange everything from the preacher to the flowers, so we've included in the following list some outfits that provide wedding services. For more information about the various options and the legal requirements for marriages on some of the more popular Caribbean islands, see chapter 2.

- **Cap Juluca** (Anguilla; ☎ 888/858-5822 in the U.S., or 264/497-6666; [www.capjuluca.com](http://www.capjuluca.com)): A unique post-modern design and a thrillingly beautiful beach are the highlights of this 72-hectare (178-acre) resort. It resembles a Saharan Casbah, with domed villas that seem to float against the scrubland and azure sky. It's an extremely stylish setting for romance. More than any other resort on Anguilla, Cap Juluca affords privacy: In their secluded villas, honeymooners can enjoy private pools and huge tubs for two. You can join other guests for meals and/or retreat into total seclusion. See p. 53.
- **St. James's Club** (Antigua; ☎ 800/858-4618 in the U.S., or 268/460-5000; [www.eliteislandresorts.com](http://www.eliteislandresorts.com)): There are enough diversions at this very posh, British-style resort to keep a honeymooning couple up and about for weeks. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are included, along with unlimited drinks. Among the perks is a private, candlelit dinner for two in a romantic setting. Honeymooners are greeted with a bottle of champagne and freshly cut bougainvillea in their rooms, which can be private villas, suites, or, for complete isolation, a hillside home. Unlike Cap Juluca, which promotes seclusion, this is for honeymooners who prefer an active lifestyle, gambling at the casino, taking in the beach, or enjoying the widest array of dining and drinking options of any hotel on the island. See p. 73.
- **Biras Creek Resort** (Virgin Gorda; ☎ 877/883-0756 in the U.S., or 284/494-3555; [www.biras.com](http://www.biras.com)): If you're eager to escape your in-laws and bridesmaids after a wedding ceremony, this is the place. It's a quintessential mariner's hideaway that can be reached only via a several-mile boat ride across the open sea. Perched on a narrow promontory jutting into the Caribbean, it's an intensely private retreat set on 60 hectares (148 acres), with a crisscrossing network of signposted nature trails. Spacious, open-air, walled showers are provided in each bathroom. Honeymooners come here not to be pampered, but to be left alone to do their thing—don't expect a lot of activities. Entertainment and dancing enliven some evenings, but for the most part, you'll enjoy utter tranquillity. Its king-size beds are the best on the island. See p. 186.
- **Peter Island Resort** (Peter Island, B.V.I.; ☎ 800/346-4451 or 284/495-2000; [www.peterisland.com](http://www.peterisland.com)): Romantics appreciate the isolation of this resort, on a 720-hectare (1,778-acre) private island south of Tortola and east of St. John. Reaching it requires a 30-minute waterborne transfer, which many urban refugees consider part of the fun. It's very laid-back—bring your new spouse and a good book, and enjoy the comings and goings of yachts at the island's private marina while you recover from the stress of your wedding. See p. 197.
- **Casa Colonial** (Dominican Republic; ☎ 809/571-9727): On the north coast of the Dominican Republic, this boutique hotel is the most elegant in the

country, a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World. Your marriage will last longer if you check into one of the lavish oceanfront master suites with a private entrance. See p. 284.

- **Sandals Royal Caribbean** (Jamaica; ☎ 800/SANDALS [726-3257] in the U.S., or 876/953-2231; www.sandals.com): There are a handful of members of this resort chain in Jamaica alone (plus three others on St. Lucia, one in Turks and Caicos, and yet another one on the island of Antigua that is far less grand). Each prides itself on providing an all-inclusive (cash-free) environment where meals are provided in abundance. Enthusiastic members of the staff bring heroic amounts of community spirit to ceremonies celebrated on-site. Sandals provides everything from a preacher to petunias (as well as champagne, a cake, and all the legalities) for you to get hitched here. Any of these resorts can provide a suitable setting, but one of the most appealing is **Sandals Royal Caribbean**, outside Montego Bay, Jamaica. See p. 368.
- **Horned Dorset Primavera Hotel** (Puerto Rico; ☎ 800/633-1857 or 787/823-4030): The most romantic place for a honeymoon on the island, this small, tranquil estate lies on the Mona Passage in western Puerto Rico, a pocket of posh where privacy is almost guaranteed. Spanish neocolonial accommodations are luxurious, and the property opens onto a long, secluded beach of white sand. There are no phones, TVs, or radios in the rooms to interfere with the soft sounds of pillow talk. This is a retreat for adults only, with no facilities for children. See p. 495.
- **Four Seasons Resort Nevis** (Nevis; ☎ 800/332-3442 in the U.S., 800/268-6282 in Canada, or 869/469-1111): Though not as historic as some of the island's plantation-style inns, the Four Seasons rules without peer as the most deluxe hotel on the island, with the most extensive facilities. Set in a palm grove adjacent to the island's finest beach, it has the atmosphere of a supremely indulgent country club. The Four Seasons offers a 4-day wedding package with a choice of ceremony styles (in a church or on a beach, with a judge or with a civil magistrate). The resort's pastry chef designs each wedding cake individually, and the staff can arrange music, photographs, flowers, legalities, and virtually anything else you want. See p. 554.
- **Anse Chastanet** (St. Lucia; ☎ 800/223-1108 in the U.S., or 758/459-7000; www.ansechastanet.com): Offering panoramic views of mountains and jungle, this intimate hotel is a winner with romantics. With its small size, it provides a lot of privacy and rustic charm. Its wedding package includes all legal processing, a wedding cake, and champagne, and add-ons cover everything from photography to a post-wedding sunset sail. See p. 573.
- **Petit St. Vincent Resort** (The Grenadines; ☎ 954/963-7401): If your idea of a honeymoon is to run away from everybody except your new spouse, this is the place. It takes about three planes and a boat to reach it, but the effort to get here is worth it, if you want total isolation and privacy. Even the staff doesn't bother you unless you raise a flag for room service. If the honeymoon's going well, you may never have to leave your stone cottage by the beach. The artfully built clubhouses and bungalows were crafted from tropical woods and local stone; the results are simultaneously rustic and lavish. See p. 648.
- **Le Grand Courlan Resort & Spa** (Tobago; ☎ 868/639-9667): This is the favorite honeymoon retreat on Tobago. If you want to be fussed over, you and your new spouse can attend the

spa for relaxing massages, or you can be left entirely alone to enjoy the bay outside your window or the sandy beach at your doorstep. From Guyanese hardwood to Italian porcelain, the decor is refined and elegant. See p. 669.

- **The Buccaneer** (St. Croix; ☎ 800/255-3881 in the U.S., or 340/712-2100; www.thebuccaneer.com): Posh and discreet, this resort has some of the most extensive vacation facilities on St.

Croix—three beaches, eight tennis courts, a spa and fitness center, an 18-hole golf course, and 3km (1¾ miles) of carefully maintained jogging trails. The accommodations include beachside rooms with fieldstone terraces leading toward the sea. The resort's stone sugar mill (originally built in 1658) is one of the most popular sites for weddings and visiting honeymooners on the island. See p. 751.

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## 8 THE BEST PLACES TO GET AWAY FROM IT ALL

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In addition to the choices below, see the listings under “The Best Places to Honeymoon,” above, for information on Peter Island Resort in the British Virgin Islands, and Petit St. Vincent Resort in The Grenadines.

- **Biras Creek Resort** (Virgin Gorda; ☎ 877/883-0756 in the U.S., or 284/494-3555; www.biras.com): The only access to this resort is by private launch. The sea air and the views over islets, cays, and deep blue waters will relax you in your charming guest room. The nautical atmosphere will quickly remove all thoughts of the 9-to-5 job you left behind. See p. 186.
- **Guana Island Club** (Guana Island, B.V.I.; ☎ 800/544-8262 in the U.S., or 284/494-2354; www.guana.com): One of the most secluded hideaways in the entire Caribbean, this resort occupies a privately owned 340-hectare (840-acre) bird sanctuary with nature trails. Head here for views of rare plant and animal life and for several excellent uncrowded beaches. See p. 197.

- **Little Cayman Beach Resort** (Little Cayman; ☎ 800/327-3835 in the U.S. and Canada, or 345/948-1033; www.littlecayman.com): The only practical way to reach the 26-sq.-km (10-sq.-mile) island where this resort is located is by airplane. Snorkelers will marvel at some of the most spectacular and colorful marine life in the Caribbean. The resort has the most complete watersports facilities on the island, and bikes are available for exploring. See p. 226.
- **Rawlins Plantation Inn** (St. Kitts; ☎ 800/346-5358 in the U.S., or 869/465-6221): Surrounded by 5 hectares (12 acres) of carefully manicured lawns and tropical shrubbery, and set on a panoramic hillock about 100m (328 ft.) above sea level, this hotel, with its rugs of locally woven rushes and carved four-poster beds, evokes a 19th-century plantation. You'll be separated from the rest of the island by hundreds of acres of sugar cane, and there are few phones and no televisions. See p. 542.

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## 9 THE BEST FAMILY VACATIONS

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- **Hyatt Regency Aruba Resort & Casino** (Aruba; ☎ 800/233-1234 in

the U.S. and Canada, or 297/586-1234; www.hyatt.com): Designed like a

luxurious hacienda, with award-winning gardens, this resort is the most upscale on Aruba. Supervised activities for children 3 to 12 include games and contests such as crab races and hula-hoop competitions. See p. 100.

- **Amaryllis Beach Resort** (Barbados; ☎ 888/790-5264 or 246/438-8000; www.amaryllisbeachresort.com): From its kiddie pool to its activity-filled children's club, this hotel along Palm Beach is the most family friendly on the island. The complex has an abundance of two-bedroom suites, ideal for the family trade. The chefs also prepare meals for families with young children. See p. 130.
- **The Ritz-Carlton** (Grand Cayman; ☎ 800/241-3333 or 345/943-9000; www.ritzcarlton.com): No one coddles families with children as much as this plush hotel. With 58 hectares (143 acres) of grounds to romp in, it's almost like staying in a landscaped park. Plus, the hotel opens onto the activity-filled Seven Mile Beach. It also offers the best children's program on island and, of course, can easily arrange babysitting. See p. 205.
- **Breezes Curaçao** (Curaçao; ☎ 599/9-736-7888; www.breezes.com): One of the most welcoming resorts for families is Breezes Curaçao, which has the best kiddie programs on island in its on-site Camp Breezes. Making it even more fun for children, the inclusive resort lies next to both the Undersea National Park and the Sea Aquarium and opens onto one of Curaçao's longest beaches. See p. 233.
- **Sunset at the Palms Resort & Spa** (Negril, Jamaica; ☎ 800/234-1707 in the U.S., or 876/957-5350; www.sunsetatthepalms.com): Rising on stilts, these wooden cottages with private decks add a sense of adventure to a beach vacation. Surrounded by tropical vegetation, families are only steps from the beach. Features for kids include a playground, computer games, arts-and-crafts lessons, and even storytelling sessions. Children 2 and under stay free if they share a room with their parent; children 3 to 12 are \$100 extra. See p. 384.
- **FDR** (Runaway Bay, Jamaica; ☎ 888/337-5437 in the U.S., or 876/973-4591; www.fdrholidays.com): FDR gives you a suite with its own kitchen, and a "vacation nanny" whose duties include babysitting. Neither its beach nor its pool is the most appealing on Jamaica, but the price is right, and the babysitting is part of the all-inclusive deal. Programs for children include dress-up parties, donkey rides, basketball, tennis, and snorkeling. See p. 402.
- **El Conquistador Resort & Golden Door Spa** (Puerto Rico; ☎ 888/543-1282 or 787/863-1000; www.elconresort.com): Located 50km (31 miles) east of San Juan, this resort offers Camp Coquí on Palomino Island for children 3 to 12 years of age. The hotel's free water taxi takes kids to the island for a half- or full day of watersports and nature hikes. A new water park also adds to the family appeal, boasting a 790-sq.-m (8,500-sq.-ft.) pool, several slides, a rope bridge, and a winding river attraction. This resort has some of the best facilities and restaurants in eastern Puerto Rico and all of the Caribbean. See p. 484.
- **Four Seasons Resort Nevis** (Nevis; ☎ 800/332-3442 in the U.S., 800/268-6282 in Canada, or 869/469-1111): The staff of the Kids for All Seasons day camp are kindly, matronly souls who work well with children. During the adult cocktail hour, when parents might opt for a romantic sundowner, kids attend a supervised children's hour that resembles a really good birthday bash. Other kid-friendly activities include

tennis lessons, watersports, and storytelling. See p. 554.

- **Beaches Turks & Caicos**, Lower Bight Road, Provo (☎ 800/232-2437): Beaches just walked away with another World Travel Award for best family resort. And why not? It's got Sesame Street characters making appearances, camps and activities for kids of all ages, kid-specific restaurants, and a full-service nursery. See p. 686.

- **The Buccaneer** (St. Croix; ☎ 800/255-3881 in the U.S., or 340/712-2100; www.thebuccaneer.com): Posh, upscale, with extremely good service, this hotel is a longtime favorite that occupies a 96-hectare (237-acre) former sugar estate. Its kids' programs (ages 2–12) include a half-day sailing excursion to Buck Island Reef and guided nature walks that let kids touch, smell, and taste tropical fruit. See p. 751.

## 10 THE BEST INNS

- **Admiral's Inn** (Antigua; ☎ 268/460-1027; www.admiralsantigua.com): The most historically evocative corner of Antigua is Nelson's Dockyard, which was originally built in the 1700s to repair His Majesty's ships. The brick-and-stone inn that flourishes here today was once a warehouse for turpentine and pitch. In the late 1960s, it was transformed into a well-designed and very charming hotel. **Note:** If you're sensitive to noise, you might be bothered by the sometimes raucous bar and restaurant. See p. 75.
- **Avila Beach Hotel** (Curaçao; ☎ 800/747-8162 or 599/9-461-4377): This hotel's historic core, built in 1780 as the "country house" of the island's governor, retains its dignity and elegance. Although it's been a hotel since the end of World War II, 150 bedrooms in outbuildings and upgraded sports and dining facilities were artfully added in recent years. Today the Avila provides a sandy beach and easy access to the shops and distractions of nearby Willemstad. See p. 235.
- **Spice Island Beach Resort** (Grenada; ☎ 473/444-4258; www.spicebeachresort.com): Each of this hotel's 66 units is a suite (with Jacuzzi) either beside the beach (one of Grenada's best) or near a swimming pool. Friday night

features live music from the island's most popular bands. See p. 310.

- **Ottley's Plantation Inn** (St. Kitts; ☎ 800/772-3039 in the U.S., or 869/465-7234): As you approach, the inn's dignified verandas appear majestically at the crest of 14 hectares (35 acres) of impeccably maintained lawns and gardens. It's one of the most charming plantation-house inns anywhere in the world, maintained with style and humor by its expatriate U.S. owners. The food is the best on the island, and the setting will soothe your tired nerves within a few hours after you arrive. See p. 542.
- **Montpelier Plantation Inn** (Nevis; ☎ 869/469-3462): Style and grace are the hallmarks of this former 18th-century plantation, now converted to an inn and set on a 12-hectare (30-acre) estate. Guests have included the late Princess of Wales. Cottage rooms are spread across 4 hectares (10 acres) of ornamental gardens. Swimming, horseback riding, windsurfing, a private beach, and "eco-rambles" fill the agenda. See p. 555.
- **The Hermitage Plantation Inn** (Nevis; ☎ 800/682-4025 in the U.S., or 869/469-3477): Guests stay in clapboard-sided cottages separated by carefully maintained bougainvillea and

grasslands. The beach is a short drive away, but this slice of 19th-century plantation life (complete with candlelit dinners amid the antiques and polished silver of the main house) is decidedly romantic. See p. 554.

- **Gallery Inn at Galería San Juan** (Puerto Rico; ☎ 866/572-ARTE [2783] or 787/722-1808; [www.galleryinn.com](http://www.galleryinn.com)): The most whimsically bohemian hotel in the Caribbean sits on a coastal bluff. Once the home of an aristocratic Spanish family, it is today filled with sculptures, silk screens, and original paintings by artist Jan D'esopo, who, along with husband Manuco

Gandía, owns the inn. Many of the rooms have dramatic views of the coast, with two historic Spanish forts framing the view. Staying in one of the comfortable rooms here is like living in an art gallery. See p. 455.

- **The Frangipani** (Bequia, The Grenadines; ☎ 784/458-3255; [www.frangipani-bequia.com](http://www.frangipani-bequia.com)): This is the century-old homestead of the Mitchell family, whose most famous scion later became prime minister of St. Vincent. Today it's a small, very relaxed inn. It's fun to watch the yachts setting out to sea from the nearby marina. See p. 640.

## 11 THE BEST ECO-FRIENDLY RESORTS

- **Brac Reef Beach Resort** (Cayman Brac; ☎ 800/594-0843 or 727/369-2507; [www.bracreef.com](http://www.bracreef.com)): Cayman Brac is a little unspoiled island off the coast of the much larger Grand Cayman. Here at this small resort, you can take a series of nature trails that cut through lush vegetation, including sea grapes, to explore the wilderness and enjoy some of the best bird-watching in the islands. This family-friendly resort also offers some of the best snorkeling in the islands. See p. 224.
- **Papillote Wilderness Retreat** (Dominica; ☎ 767/448-2287; [www.papillote.dm](http://www.papillote.dm)): In the middle of one of the Caribbean's most lush rainforests, at the foot of a mountain, this intimate inn returns you to nature in its remote setting of exotic fruits, flowers, and herb gardens. You'll feel like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Natural hot mineral baths are offered, and you can follow a trail to a secluded waterfall for a river swim. Rooms are rustic but comfortable. See p. 257.
- **Natura Cabañas & the Attabeyra Spa** (Cabarete, Dominican Republic; ☎ 809/571-1507; [www.naturacabana.com](http://www.naturacabana.com)): The most eco-sensitive hotel in the Dominican Republic lies between Cabarete and Sosúa, attracting New Age patrons drawn to its setting. Some guests are housed in mushroom-shaped organic-looking structures. During the day, guests can swim, enjoy the spa, or go horseback riding. Mountain bikes or jeeps also can be used to explore this remote part of the country. Or you can just spend the day in a hammock. See p. 292.
- **Asa Wright Nature Centre & Lodge** (Trinidad; ☎ 800/426-7781 in the U.S., or 868/667-4655; [www.asawright.org](http://www.asawright.org)): Known to bird-watchers around the world, this is the most legendary eco-retreat in the Caribbean, standing on 74 hectares (183 acres) of protected land at an elevation of 360m (1,181 ft.) in a rainforest in a mountain range in Trinidad. Nature lovers from all over the world flock here to see the vast array of birdlife, including hummingbirds, toucans, manikins, tanagers, and even the rare oilbird. Guided tours are available along trails to a natural waterfall.



Accommodations are in a 1908 Edwardian house and various cottages. See p. 656.

- **Cinnamon Bay Campground** (St. John; ☎ 340/776-6330; www.cinnamonbay.com): This National Park Service campground is the best in the Caribbean, and it's set directly on a sandy

beach surrounded by thousands of acres of tropical vegetation. You can stay here in a cottage or a tent, or else rent a bare site. Guests take cool water showers and cook their own meals when not swimming, sailing, snorkeling, windsurfing, or hiking through trails in the national park. See p. 739.

## 12 THE BEST DINING

- **Blanchards** (Anguilla; ☎ 264/497-6100): On this pricey, fashionable island, Bob and Melinda Blanchard serve a repertoire of dishes that are both sublime and inventive. For their inspiration, they turn to the kitchens of the world. Celebs such as Robert De Niro and Janet Jackson have praised their wine cellar, arguably the best in the Caribbean. Exceptional products are prepared with a finely honed technique. See p. 57.
- **The Reef Grill at Royal Palms** (Grand Cayman; ☎ 345/945-6358): Elegant and hip, this hotshot restaurant in the Royal Palms Beach Club opens onto the fabled Seven Mile Beach. Adjacent to a beachfront bar and grill, it is a citadel of fine cuisine, specializing in seafood recently plucked from the nearby sea. The chefs treat seasonal products with care, turning out technically precise dishes that also have imagination. (Anyone for mashed potatoes garnished with chunks of lobster tail?) See p. 212.
- **La Belle Epoque** (Martinique; ☎ 596/64-41-19): The best haute cuisine on this island is dispensed at this long-established gourmet citadel high above the capital of Fort-de-France. The restaurant is about as close as Martinique

comes to duplicating the superb viands of Mother France. The cuisine shows a complete mastery of a fertile culinary imagination. See p. 423.

- **Le Sapotillier** (St. Barthélemy; ☎ 590/27-60-28): Before upstart Anguilla stole a lot of their thunder, the chefs of St. Barts were known as the finest in the Caribbean, although that's open to argument. Competition has come and gone, and still St. Barts' chefs rank among the top, especially at this West Indian house in the capital of Gustavia. The French-inspired cuisine served here emphasizes seafood but does a number of other dishes remarkably well. Under its namesake, a sapodilla tree, you can feast on such traditional dishes as duck foie gras or veal stew in a Roquefort sauce. See p. 520.
- **The Edge** (St. Lucia; ☎ 758/450-3343): Swedish-born Bobo Bergström is hailed as St. Lucia's finest chef—and the competition is keen. His European fusion cuisine produces thrilling gastronomic delights, and he also offers the first and only sushi bar ever set up on St. Lucia. In 2003 he was designated as Caribbean Chef of the Year. We'll let you in on a secret: He's gotten even better since then. See p. 585.

## 13 THE BEST DESTINATIONS FOR SHOPPERS

Because the U.S. government allows its citizens to take (or send) home more duty-

free goods from the U.S. Virgins than from other ports of call, the U.S. Virgin



Islands remain the shopping bazaar of the Caribbean. U.S. citizens may carry home \$1,400 worth of goods untaxed, as opposed to only \$400 to \$600 worth of goods from most other islands in the Caribbean. (The only exception to this rule is Puerto Rico, where any purchase, regardless of the amount, can be carried tax-free back to the U.S. mainland.) St. Maarten/St. Martin, which is ruled jointly by France and the Netherlands, gives the Virgins some serious competition. It is virtually a shopper's mall, especially on the Dutch side. Although the U.S. doesn't grant the generous Customs allowances on St. Maarten/St. Martin that it does to its own islands, the island doesn't have duty, so you can find some attractive bargains.

- **Aruba:** The wisest shoppers on Aruba are cost-conscious souls who have carefully checked the prices of comparable goods before leaving home. Duty is relatively low (only 3.3%). Much of the European china, jewelry, perfumes, and watches have a disconcerting habit of reappearing in every shopping mall and hotel boutique on the island, so after you determine exactly which brand of watch or china you want, you can comparison-shop. See chapter 5.
- **Barbados:** Local shops seem to specialize in all things English. Merchandise includes bone china from British and Irish manufacturers, watches, jewelry, and perfumes. Bridgetown's Broad Street is the shopping headquarters of the island, although some of the stores here maintain boutiques (with similar prices but a less extensive range of merchandise) at many of the island's hotels and in malls along the congested southwestern coast. Except for cigarettes and tobacco, duty-free items can be hauled off by any buyer as soon as they're paid for. Duty-free status is extended to anyone showing a passport or ID and an airline ticket with a date of departure from Barbados. See chapter 6.
- **The Cayman Islands:** Goods are sold tax-free from a daunting collection of malls and minimalls throughout Grand Cayman. Most of these are along the highway that parallels Seven Mile Beach; you'll need a car to shop around. There are also lots of stores in George Town, which you can explore on foot, poking in and out of some large emporiums in your search for bargains. See chapter 9.
- **Curaçao:** In the island's capital, tidy and prosperous Willemstad, hundreds of merchants are only too happy to cater to your needs. A handful of malls lies on Willemstad's outskirts, but most shops are clustered within a few blocks of the center of town. During seasonal sales, goods might be up to 50% less than comparable prices in the United States; most of the year, you'll find luxury items (porcelain, crystal, watches, and gemstones) priced at about 25% less than in the U.S. Technically, you'll pay import duties on virtually everything you buy, but rates are so low you may not even notice. See chapter 10.
- **The Dominican Republic:** The island's best buys include handicrafts, amber from Dominican mines, and the distinctive pale-blue semiprecious gemstone known as larimar. The amber sold by street vendors may be nothing more than orange-colored, transparent plastic; buy only from well-established shops if your investment is a large one. Other charming souvenirs might include a Dominican rocking chair (JFK used to sit in one), which is sold boxed, in ready-to-assemble pieces. Malls and souvenir stands abound in Santo Domingo, in Puerto Plata, and along the country's northern coast. See chapter 12.
- **Jamaica:** The shopping was better in the good old days, before taxes added a 10% surcharge. Despite that, Jamaica offers a wealth of desirable goods,

including flavored rums, Jamaican coffees, handicrafts (such as woodcarvings, woven baskets, and sandals), original paintings and sculpture, and cameras, watches, and DVD players. Unless you're a glutton for handmade souvenirs (which are available on virtually every beach and street corner), you'd be wise to limit most of your purchases to bona fide merchants and stores. See chapter 15.

- **Puerto Rico:** For U.S. citizens, there's no duty on anything bought in Puerto Rico, but that doesn't guarantee prices will be particularly low. You can find lots of jewelry and watches in the island's best-stocked area, Old San Juan. Also of interest are such Puerto Rican handicrafts as charming folkloric papier-mâché carnival masks and santos, carved wooden figures depicting saints.
- **St. Maarten/St. Martin:** Because of the massive influx of cruise ships, shopping in Dutch St. Maarten is now about the finest in the Caribbean, though you may have to fight the crowds. Because there's no duty, prices can be 30% to 50% lower than in the U.S. Forget about local crafts and concentrate on leather goods, electronics, cameras, designer fashions, watches, and crystal, along with linens and jewelry. Philipsburg, capital of the island's Dutch side, is the best place to shop. Although it can't compete with Dutch St. Maarten,

French St. Martin is becoming a more popular shopping destination, especially for goods such as fashion or perfumes imported from France. See chapter 23.

- **St. Croix:** This island doesn't have the massive shopping development of St. Thomas, but its merchandise has never been more wide-ranging than it is today. Even though most cruise ships call at Frederiksted, with its urban mall, our favorite shops are in Christiansted, which has many one-of-a-kind boutiques and a lot of special finds. Prices are about the same here as on St. Thomas. See chapter 27.
- **St. Thomas:** Many of its busiest shops are in restored warehouses that were originally built in the 1700s. Charlotte Amalie, the capital, is a shopper's town, with a staggering number of stores stocked with more merchandise than anywhere else in the entire Caribbean. However, despite all the fanfare, real bargains are hard to come by. Regardless, the island attracts hordes of cruise-ship passengers on a sometimes-frantic hunt for bargains, real or imagined. Look for two local publications, *This Week* and *Best Buys*; either might steer you to the type of merchandise you're seeking. If at all possible, try to avoid shopping when more than one cruise ship is in port—the shopping district is a madhouse on those days. See chapter 27.

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## 14 THE BEST NIGHTLIFE

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Nighttime is sleep time on the British Virgins, Montserrat, Nevis, Anguilla, St. Eustatius, Saba, St. Barts, Dominica, Bonaire, St. Vincent, and all of The Grenadines. The serious partier will probably want to choose one of the following destinations.

- **Aruba:** Aruba has 12 casinos, each with its own unique decor and each with a

following of devoted gamblers. They offer cabarets and comedy shows, dance floors with live or recorded music, restaurants of all degrees of formality, and bars. The casinos are big, splashy, colorful, and, yes, people even occasionally win. Drinks are usually free while you play. The legal tender in most of Aruba's casinos is the U.S. dollar. See chapter 5.

- **Barbados:** Bridgetown is home to rum-and-reggae cruises, as well as oversize music bars like Harbour Lights. Otherwise, a host of bars, British-style pubs, dozens of restaurants, and dance clubs (both within and outside large hotels) beckon from St. Lawrence Gap or the crowded southwest coast. See chapter 6.
- **Curaçao:** Although outdistanced by Aruba, the action spinning around the island's casinos makes this one of the southern Caribbean's hot spots for gamblers. Salinja, a sector of Willemstad, has lively bars where locals and visitors drink and party until the wee hours, and live jazz often fills the air. See chapter 10.
- **The Dominican Republic:** Large resort hotels in the Dominican Republic evoke a Latino version of Las Vegas. If cabaret shows aren't your thing, there are enough dance clubs in the major towns and resorts to keep nightclubbers busy for weeks. The tourist areas of Puerto Plata and Santo Domingo are sprinkled with casinos, and the island's ever-developing north shore contains its share of jingle-jangle, too. See chapter 12.
- **Jamaica:** Many visitors are drawn here by a love for the island's distinct musical forms. Foremost among these are reggae and soca, both of which are performed at hotels, resorts, and raffish dives all over the island. Hotels often stage folkloric shows that include entertainers who sing, dance, swallow torches, and walk on broken glass. There are also plenty of indoor/outdoor bars where you might actually be able to talk to people. See chapter 15.
- **Puerto Rico:** Puerto Rico contains all the raw ingredients for great nightlife, including casinos, endless rows of bars and taverns, cabaret shows with girls

and glitter, and dance clubs that feature everything from New York imports to some of the best salsa and merengue anywhere. The country's gaming headquarters lies along the Condado in San Juan, although there are also casinos in megaresorts scattered throughout the island. The casinos here are the most fun in the Caribbean. Each contains lots of sideshows (restaurants, merengue bars, art galleries, piano bars, and shops) that can distract you from the roulette and slots. Puerto Ricans take pride in dressing well at their local casinos, which enhances an evening's glamour. (**Note:** You can't drink at the tables.) If you're a really serious partier, you'll have lots of company in Puerto Rico. Be prepared to stay out very late; you can recover from your Bacardi hangover on a palm-fringed beach the next day. See chapter 17.

- **St. Maarten/St. Martin:** This island has a rather cosmopolitan nightlife and contains the densest concentration of restaurants in the Caribbean, each with its own bar. Dance clubs are often indoor/outdoor affairs. Casinos abound on the Dutch side, and if you're addicted to the jingle of slot machines and roulette wheels, you won't lack for company. The casinos tend to be low-key, which might appeal to you if you dislike high-stakes tables with lots of intensity. See chapter 23.
- **St. Thomas:** The Virgin Islands' most active nightlife is found here. Don't expect glitzy shows like those in San Juan's Condado area, and don't expect any kind of casino. But you can find plenty of fun at the beach bars, restaurants, concerts, clubs, and folklore and reggae shows. See chapter 27.