

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 outdoor 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 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 Îlet Pinel (Pinel Island) near St. Martin's Orient Beach, or taking similar day trips off-island to Anguilla's Scilly Cay, Sandy Island, Prickly Pear, and Dog Island. See p. 89 and 150.
- **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. 91.
- **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.

Prickly Pear Cay

ANGUILLA

(U.K.)

The Valley

SAINT-MARTIN

(FRANCE)

Marigot

Orleans

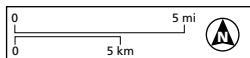
SINT MAARTEN

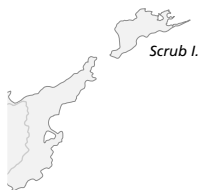
(NETHERLANDS)

Philipsburg

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 ziplines or hike through virgin rainforest, followed by a meal at the lovely Hidden Forest Cafe. See p. 85.
- **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. 56.
- **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. 95.
- **Chilling in an Anguilla Beach Bar:** No place gets the beach-bar culture as right as Anguilla, where the vibe is laidback, the food tasty, the music toe-tapping, and the setting sublime. It'll cure whatever ails you. See p. 146.
- **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 at sunset. See p. 140.
- **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. 186.
- **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. 184.
- **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, pâtés, wine, and—ooh-la-la!—the French version of canned ravioli. See p. 187.

2 THE BEST BEACHES

- **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. 88.
- **Mullet Bay, St. Maarten:** This beautiful beach has a couple of beach shacks serving food and drinks and a sprinkling of umbrellas and chairs, but nowhere near the activity it once enjoyed as the silky strand fronting the Mullet Bay Resort, the island's first resort and now in a state of (seemingly) perpetual ruin after Hurricane Luis took it out of commission in 1995. The blue pearlescent waters are calm, and the snorkeling isn't bad along the rocks. See p. 87.
- **Simpson Bay, St. Maarten:** In spite of its proximity to the airport and the cluttered bar/casino/restaurant activity around the Simpson Bay area, this beach is quiet and peaceful, with long stretches of curving sand and sparkling turquoise seas. A good place to access the beach is at Mary's Boon Beach Resort. See p. 87.
- **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 watersports action and a lively beach-bar scene, this is the place to find it. See p. 90.
- **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. 88.
- **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. 91.
- **Happy Bay, St. Martin:** You can only reach this pretty, remarkably deserted scimitar of sand by boat or by a short hike from Friars Bay; bring a snorkel and fins. See p. 90.
- **Pinel Island, St. Martin:** This tiny offshore cay makes for a wonderful day trip with a perfect lagoon to paddle around in. See p. 89.

- **Shoal Bay East, Anguilla:** Not to be confused with Shoal Bay West, this beach offers both rollicking beach bars and seclusion, with great snorkeling on its less-trafficked eastern flank. See p. 150.
- **Rendezvous Bay, Anguilla:** This picture-perfect beach curls and stretches its sands for nearly 3 miles—it's a great swimming beach. See p. 149.
- **Maundays Bay, Anguilla:** The prime beach for the Cap Juluca resort, Maundays Bay has calm, sparkling waters that are perfect for swimming and snorkeling. See p. 151.
- **Meads Bay, Anguilla:** Big, languorous rolls and gin-clear turquoise seas are overseen by swooping pelicans. Take your snorkeling equipment to the rocks beneath the Malliouhana resort. See p. 149.
- **Offshore Cays, Anguilla:** Head out for a castaway adventure to such delicious spits of sand as Dog Island, Prickly Pear, Sandy Island, and Scilly Cay—the latter three also have ramshackle beach bars where lobster is grilled to perfection. See p. 150.
- **St-Jean Beach, St. Barts:** This beach is split into two beaches by the Eden Rock hotel, but it's lovely nonetheless, and just steps away from great shopping and dining. See p. 184.
- **Colombier Beach, St. Barts:** This beloved beach can only be reached by two hiking trails—one a 25-minute walk along a rocky goat trail—or by boat. It's ideal for swimming and snorkeling. See p. 185.
- **Flamands Beach, St. Barts:** The island's biggest beach, Flamands has fine sand and that rarity on St. Barts beaches: shade. See p. 184.
- **Gouverneur Beach, St. Barts:** On the island's south side, this beach is just steps from the parking lot. It's a beauty, with good surf and snorkeling by the rocks. See p. 185.
- **Salines Beach, St. Barts:** From the parking lot, it's a 10- or 15-minute walk along somewhat rocky terrain to this protected cove with body-surfable waves. Like all of St. Barts' strands, it's clothing optional. Spend a morning here, then head to Grain de Sel for a spot-on Creole lunch. See p. 185.

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 24-room hotel is

decked out in colorful tiles and pillowed in a profusion of tropical blooms, and the rooms manage to be utterly private, beautifully outfitted, and comfortably homey all at once. You're just 5 minutes away from bustling Grand Case below, but this tranquil spot feels like a world apart. See p. 59.

- **Malliouhana**, Anguilla (☎ 800/835-0796). Set atop a limestone bluff overlooking Meads Bay, this venerable resort is a true getaway. The hotel sprawls over 25 acres of gently curving, beautifully landscaped property, and tiered public spaces let you move around the resort discreetly. See p. 133.
- **Palm Grove**, Anguilla (☎ 264/497-4224). Down a long, winding potholed road that cuts through scrub brush is this idyllic spot, the rough-hewn culinary domain of Nat Richardson and one of the sweetest snorkeling beaches on the island. Nat's place is little more than a beach shack, but his barbecued specialties (lobster, crayfish, ribs, chicken, fresh fish) are well worth the trip. The johnnycakes are first-rate, too. See p. 146.
- **Le Toiny**, St. Barts (☎ 800/278-6469). In your gloriously furnished villa, with its own private plunge pool, tiled terrace, and gated entrance, you don't have to see or be seen by anyone—even breakfast arrives in a hush, set out on a patio table sheathed in crisp linens and silver cutlery. From every vantage point, the sea/sky/mountain vista is soul-stirring. See p. 170.

4 THE BEST LUXURY HOTELS

- **La Samanna**, Baie Longue, St. Martin (☎ 800/237-1236), is rare among resorts in its class, 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. 56.
- **Cap Juluca**, Maundays Bay, Anguilla (☎ 888/858-5822), is always at or near the top of everyone's "Best Of" lists—and a refashioning of the lobby and public spaces has made the place feel fresh and vigorous again. It's a favorite of celebrities and captains of industry, but regular folks get the royal treatment, too. See p. 131.
- **Malliouhana**, Mead's Bay, Anguilla (☎ 800/835-0796). The grande dame of Anguilla (celebrating its 25th year) may have the most beautiful *situation* in the Caribbean. Add to that thoughtful landscaping, a fine beach (with surprisingly good off-the-beach snorkeling), a world-class spa, solid new hands-on management,

and owner Leon Roydon's collecting passions on display: colorful Haitian art and arguably the Caribbean's finest wine cellar. See p. 133.

- **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. 132.
- **Viceroy**, Anguilla (☎ 888/622-4567). From afar, it looks like a small city landed on the promontory between Meads Bay and Barnes Bay. Up close, this huge property's sleek white structures are smartly juxtaposed against the deep-blue sea and sky. Rooms are outfitted with every 21st-century toy and dazzling Malibu-meets-Miami interiors by Kelly Wearstler. See p. 134.
- **Eden Rock**, Baie de St-Jean, St. Barts (☎ 877/563-7105). Its lodgings are staggered on either side of the titular bluff that cleaves the bay. Owners David and Jane Matthews never rest on their laurels, constantly improving one of the Caribbean's most elegant enclaves. See p. 168.
- **Hotel Christopher**, St. Barts (☎ 590/27-63-63). Yes, rooms are small and the rates not even close to luxury-resort stratospheric. But this smart, sophisticated, and intimate spot is an earthy sanctuary of barefoot luxury. Every detail has been painstakingly thought out, from the impeccably (and sustainably) sourced materials and ultrafine linens to the custom-made toiletries and attentive but never obsequious service. And that view! Watch the sunset while relaxing on your terrace or lounging around the island's largest infinity pool. See p. 175.
- **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. 171.
- **The Villas at Le Sereno**, Grand Cul-de-Sac, St. Barts (☎ 590/52-83-00), are simply spectacular, with panoramic views of Grand Cul-de-Sac. They include designer kitchens stocked with Le Creuset pots and pans and big plunge pools. See p. 170.
- **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 comfortable. It opens right onto glorious Flamands beach. See p. 169.

5 THE BEST DINING

- **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. See p. 69.
- **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. 78.
- **Lolos**, St. Martin/St. Maarten, is a term for basic outdoor barbecue shacks that dish out heaping helpings of Creole fare at unbelievably fair prices. The biggest concentration lies along the beach in Grand Case. See p. 77.
- **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. 141.
- **Da'Vida**, Anguilla (☎ 264/498-5433). Anguillian Chef Guy Gumbs' restaurant is one of the island's favorite places for celebratory dinners. Da'Vida—whose motto is “Celebrate Life”—comprises a more upscale open-air restaurant and the casual **Bayside Grill**. The menu draws heavily on local seafood (crayfish, snapper, grouper) and does creative twists on traditional island cuisine. Everything is just steps from shimmering Crocus Bay. See p. 145.
- **Veya** (Anguilla; ☎ 264/498-8392): On an island blessed with top-caliber chefs and the Caribbean's best dining scene, this Sandy Ground “treehouse” is one of the best—and it's only been around since 2007. The Pennsylvanian chef/owners call their food the “cuisine of the sun,” and it's a minxy fusion of exotic flavors from hot spots around the globe. See p. 144.
- **Le Gaïac**, Anse de Toiny, St. Barts (☎ 590/27-88-88), in the Le Toiny hotel, has an ambience that is swooningly romantic at dinner and food that is sublime any time. See p. 183.
- **Dining Beachside on St. Barts:** You can do it high (**Santa Fe**, overlooking **Gouverneur Beach**) or you can do it low (**Do Brazil**, on the sands of Shell Beach) but dining on St. Barts' beaches is simply divine. Try it casual (**O'Corrail**, Grand Cul-de-Sac) or fancy (Eden Rock's **On the Rocks**, overlooking Baie St-Jean). See chapter 9.

6 THE BEST SHOPPING

- **Front Street** in Philipsburg, St. Maarten is a mind-boggling display of rampant consumerism. And it's all duty-free, from luxury watches to diamonds to Delft china. See chapter 6.
- **Marigot, French St. Martin.** Skip the icy air-conditioned and marbled West Indies Mall and explore the streets of this charming village for shops selling prêt-a-porter, atmospheric wine stores, and French pharmacies. The tiny warrens and back alleys around the marina are filled with serendipitous finds. See chapter 6.
- **Artists' ateliers** on French St. Martin 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.
- **Gustavia**, the capital of St. Barts, is crammed with stores selling couture and prêt-a-porter. Many of the luxury brands are here: Bulgari, Cartier, Giorgio Armani, Louis Vuitton, and Hermès. See chapter 8.
- **St-Jean, St. Barts**, has several small shopping plazas along the main road leading toward Lorient: Les Galeries du Commerce, La Villa Creole, La Sodexa, and L'Espace Neptune, each filled with boutiques selling the stylishly casual St. Barts clothing we cover: flirty, sexy kurtas and dresses; slouchy jersey separates; gold and silver sandals or bejeweled flip-flops. See chapter 6.
- **La Ligne St. Barth**, Lorient, St. Barts (☎ 590/27-82-63), produces skincare, scents, and cosmetic products made with extracts from Caribbean flowers and seeds. The company laboratory/shop on Route de Salines in Lorient often offers slightly damaged products at deep discounts. See p. 188.

7 THE BEST NIGHTLIFE

- **Bliss**, St. Maarten (☎ 599/545-3936), sounds like a spa, but it's actually Bernie's equally sizzling neighbor, another multipurpose beachfront nightclub-cum-restaurant-cum-live-music-venue. See p. 110.
- **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, **Tantra**. See p. 118.

- **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. 113.
- **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. 115.
- **Johnno's Beach Stop**, Sandy Ground, Anguilla (☎ 264/497-2728), is another enduringly popular haunt that draws everyone from locals to the Hollywood elite for great barbecue and live music on the beach. See p. 147.
- **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 is owned by Anguilla's best-known singer, "Bankie" Banx; the place is jammed when he performs. See p. 147.
- **Le Bête à Z'Ailes** (also known as the Baz Bar) on the harbor in Gustavia, St. Barts (☎ 590/92-74-09) is a happening live music club, where an eclectic assortment of bands play soul, jazz, blues, urban folk, and indie tunes, accompanied by excellent sushi and creative cocktails. See p. 190.
- **Le Ti St. Barth**, Pointe Milou, St. Barts (☎ 590/27-97-71), serves up uneven but often excellent food in a torchlit setting that lures the wealthy and beautiful for fashion shows and theme nights. See p. 190.