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# Insider's Guide to St. Barths

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Image courtesy of Rosewood Le Guanahani St Barth

St. Barths figured out what the rest of the Caribbean is still trying to perfect: how to make luxury feel relaxed. There's real French sophistication here—cobblestone streets in Gustavia,

bistros serving perfect croissants, yacht-filled harbors that could be mistaken for the Côte d'Azur. But none of it feels precious. This is still the Caribbean, where bare feet and beach hair are the uniform.

What sets St. Barths apart is how it balances its dual identity. You can spend your morning hiking to the secluded shores of Colombier Beach and your afternoon browsing designer boutiques in Gustavia. Sail around the coastline at sunset, then settle in for a five-course dinner. Flamands and Saline rank among the region's most beautiful beaches, and those winding hillside roads lead to viewpoints and hidden coves that make every wrong turn feel like a discovery.

## Need to know



Image courtesy of Tropical Hotel St Barth

Learn the best times to travel, how to get there, and entry requirements to help you enjoy a St. Barths escape.

**Currency:** The Euro (EUR) is the official currency. Credit cards are widely accepted, though it's wise to carry cash for smaller boutiques, beach clubs, and local markets. Tipping 10–15% at restaurants is customary, but rounding up is also common.

**Languages:** French is the official language, though English is widely spoken in hotels, restaurants, and tourist areas. Picking up a few French phrases shows cultural respect and enhances interactions with locals.

- **Key phrases:** *bonjour* (hello), *merci* (thank you), *s'il vous plaît* (please), *pardon* (excuse me/sorry), *comment ça va?* (how are you?), *oui/non* (yes/no), *je ne parle pas français* (I don't speak French), *parlez-vous anglais?* (do you speak English?).

**Airports:** Gustaf III Airport (SBH) is the island's main gateway. Its short runway means flights on small planes from San Juan, St. Thomas, St. Martin, and other nearby islands. Surrounding hills and close proximity to a nearby road make for a memorable landing experience.

**Transportation:** Renting a car or moke—an open-air golf cart-style vehicle—is ideal for reaching secluded spots, with convenient pick-up options at the airport or through hotels. Taxis serve as a backup, though they can be expensive and sometimes scarce.

**Best time to visit:** Visit between December and mid-April for perfect beach weather, calm seas, and the island's lively social scene. May and June bring quieter beaches, and hot and humid weather. Most hotels and restaurants close from late August through October for the off-season, which coincides with peak hurricane season.

**Ideal length of stay:** Four nights is the minimum needed to enjoy a taste of St. Barths' effortless luxury. One week allows more time to explore hidden beaches, gourmet dining, and island nightlife.

### Signature dishes and drinks:

- **Accras de morue:** Crispy cod fritters served with spicy Creole sauce.
- **Colombo:** A Caribbean curry made with chicken, goat, or seafood and island spices.
- **Langouste grillée:** Fresh local spiny lobster grilled and often served with garlic butter or Creole seasoning.
- **Bokit:** Fried bread sandwiches filled with fish, chicken, or vegetables.

- **Tartare de thon:** Fresh tuna tartare prepared with lime, herbs, and local olive oil.
- **Pain de coco:** Sweet coconut bread, often enjoyed at breakfast or as a snack.
- **Ti' punch:** The island's signature cocktail with rhum agricole, lime, and cane syrup.
- **Planteur:** A fruity rum punch blended with tropical juices and island spices.
- **Rosé wine:** A staple of St. Barths' beachside dining culture, typically enjoyed chilled with sea views.
- **Rhum arrangé:** Local infused rum flavored with vanilla, cinnamon, or tropical fruits.

**What to wear:** Pack light, airy pieces for beach days and relaxed lunches. Keep a chic, elevated outfit on hand for fine dining and nightlife. St. Barths draws a stylish crowd, so don your most polished looks to blend with the island's glamour.

#### Travel tips:

- **Smoking:** Restricted indoors and in many public spaces.
- **Drinking:** Alcohol is legal at 18, but public drinking outside designated areas is prohibited.
- **Driving:** Roads can be narrow and winding, with cars driving on the right. St. Barths is tiny, taking about 20 minutes from end to end making it easy to explore.
- **Medications:** Bring prescriptions in original packaging; pharmacies are available, but some medicines may require a prescription.

## Gustavia and Saint-Jean



Image courtesy of Eden Rock - St Barths

Gustavia, the island's capital, charms visitors with a picturesque harbor, luxury boutiques, and fine dining. Just a short drive away, Saint-Jean pairs its iconic beach and turquoise waters with a lively energy, where sunbathing, swimming, and water sports create a perfect daytime escape.

## Where to stay

**Hotel Barrière Le Carl Gustaf St Barth:** A storied, intimate hideaway overlooking the harbor in Gustavia. Island charm meets elegant service with pastel rooms, a relaxed waterfront restaurant, and sunsets best enjoyed from the terrace.

- **Fora Reserve perks** include a \$100 food and beverage credit, daily breakfast, welcome amenity, roundtrip transfers, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

**Tropical Hotel St Barth:** A boutique, garden-framed retreat with a casual, barefoot vibe. Bright, airy rooms and a simple pool make it a quietly stylish base for island exploration, and easy access to some of the island's best beaches.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$100 hotel credit, welcome amenity, an upgrade whenever possible, and guaranteed late check-out.

**Eden Rock - St Barths:** Iconic and glamorous, Eden Rock is set on a rocky point with direct access to crystal clear waters. Bold designer suites, beachfront dining, and artful interiors make it a go-to for travelers seeking celebration and sophistication.

- **Fora's Oetker Pearl Partner** perks include a \$100 hotel credit, daily breakfast, and priority access to a courtesy car.

**Pearl Beach Hotel St Barth:** A refined, beachside retreat with contemporary rooms and a tranquil pool set steps from the sand. Quiet elegance and attentive service create a restful atmosphere for couples and small groups.

## Flamands and Colombier Beach



Image courtesy of Gyp Sea Hotel

Flamands stretches along a golden coastline, offering a relaxed, elegant beach experience against gentle hills and swaying palms. Nearby Colombier Beach, accessible only by foot or boat, is a secluded cove with powdery sand and calm waters for a quiet, intimate retreat.

## Where to stay

**Cheval Blanc St-Barth:** Ultra-luxury in a modern, Caribbean setting, where private villas and signature Cheval Blanc service blend for a highly curated stay. Expect bespoke experiences, refined dining, and immaculate design across the property.

- **Fora Reserve perks** include a \$100 hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

**Hotel Manapany:** A sleek, eco-conscious resort on a quiet stretch of coastline with modern rooms and a beachfront pool. The property's clean-lined design and ocean-facing terraces make it ideal for guests seeking understated seaside comfort.

- **Fora's Dorchester Diamond Club** partner perks include a \$100 food and beverage credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

**Gyp Sea Hotel:** A chic, bohemian-style hotel with bright décor, close beach access, and a social pool scene. It's relaxed, stylish, and perfectly placed for switching between sunbathing at their beach club and enjoying the island's nearby cafés.

- **Fora Perks** include daily breakfast and a bottle of wine.

# Grand Cul-de-Sac and Toiny



Image courtesy of Le Sereno

Grand Cul-de-Sac combines calm lagoon waters with soft sandy beaches and charming resorts that define quiet luxury. Toiny's dramatic cliffs provide a raw, windswept beauty on the rugged southeastern coast for a striking, off-the-beaten-path setting.

## Where to stay

**Rosewood Le Guanahani St Barth:** Tropical elegance with villa-style accommodations, manicured gardens, and sheltered bays that feel private and protected. Upscale dining, a serene spa, and thoughtful service create a polished island retreat.

- **Fora's Rosewood Elite** partner perks include up to EUR 350 resort credit, daily breakfast, welcome amenity, an upgrade, and extended check-in whenever possible.

**Le Sereno:** Minimalist luxury on a sweeping bay, where chic suites and private villas open onto soft sand and calm turquoise waters. The remote setting is serene and sophisticated, ideal for honeymooners and romantic getaways.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$100 hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

**Le Barthélémy Hotel & Spa:** A contemporary beachfront hotel centered on wellness and relaxed luxury, with a standout spa and refined waterside dining. Neutral palettes, natural materials, and refined service make for a tranquil escape.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$125 hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

**Le Toiny Hôtel & Beach Club:** A secluded, adults-focused hideaway above a private cove, offering villa-style rooms and expansive ocean views. Intimate, service-forward, and quietly glamorous, this escape is perfect for a private, romantic retreat.

- **Fora Reserve perks** include a \$100 food and beverage credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

**Hotel Christopher Saint-Barth:** Chic and contemporary on Pointe Milou with panoramic ocean views and dramatic sunsets. The infinity pool, acclaimed Sisley Spa, and elegant open-air dining create a stylish yet relaxed atmosphere.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$100 hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

## Cruising to and around St. Barths



Image courtesy of Ritz Carlton Yacht Collection

Cruising to St. Barths offers a glimpse of French Caribbean glamour framed by turquoise bays and hillside villas. Most ships anchor offshore, tendering guests into Gustavia's postcard-perfect harbor that's lined with boutiques, cafés, and private yachts. The port is small, ideal for intimate ships and luxury lines that linger for the day. St. Barths is mostly featured on six- to seven-night sailings roundtrip from San Juan or one-way between San Juan and Bridgetown, as well as longer Caribbean itineraries from Miami or Galveston. Extended port calls allow ample time to wander cobblestone streets, visit beaches, or enjoy a seaside lunch.

## Notable cruise lines

**Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection:** Combining private yacht elegance and polish across spacious suites with terraces, curated shore experiences, and elevated dining. Expect classic Ritz-Carlton service aboard their sleek, design-forward ships.

- **Fora's STARS Program** partner perks include \$250 shipboard credit per suite, welcome amenity, exclusive shore excursion options, enhanced recognition on board, and more.

**Regent Seven Seas Cruises:** A true all-inclusive luxury line where every detail is taken care of, from gourmet dining to premium excursions and spacious suites. Known for its impeccable service and grand itineraries, Regent delivers an experience that feels indulgent and effortless.

- Virtuoso Voyages Hosted Benefits available on select sailings.

## History and culture



St. Barthélemy, or St. Barths, carries a layered past stretching from pre-Columbian islanders to the polished, small-island luxury it is known for today. Archaeological evidence points to early habitation by Arawak and Carib peoples long before the arrival of Europeans in the 16th century. The island was swept up in the wider currents of colonial trade, including sugar plantations, privateering, and the painful legacy of slavery. In 1784, France sold the island to Sweden, who developed Gustavia as a free port. The city's harbor, Swedish clock tower, and red-roofed colonial buildings remain as reminders of that era. After France repurchased the island in 1878, slowly transforming it from a sleepy trading outpost into a refuge for sailors, artists, and luxury travelers.

Today, the island balances cosmopolitan gloss with strong local traditions. Catholic feast days and Carnival continue to punctuate the calendar. Creole and French culinary influences mix on restaurant tables. The island community prizes resilience and stewardship, visible in rebuilding after hurricanes and ongoing efforts to protect coral reefs and coastal landscapes. Visitors will find history tucked into Gustavia's narrow streets, quiet coves where pirates once hid, and in the subtle blend of French chic and island informality that shapes daily life. From morning markets to sunset regattas, St. Barths is a place of both remarkable natural beauty and a layered, living history.

## Cultural celebrations and events

- **St. Barth's Music Festival (January):** A standout cultural event that brings international orchestras, jazz masters, and opera stars to the island's venues.
- **St. Barth's Bucket Regatta (March):** Gustavia's harbor hosts the world-class Bucket Regatta, where superyachts race and friends gather for social events.
- **Les Voiles de St. Barth (April):** This major sailing week welcomes top sailors and yachts from across the world for competitive races and island festivities.
- **Bastille Day (July 14th):** A lively national celebration of French heritage featuring fireworks, maritime parades, and street parties.
- **St. Barth's Gourmet Festival (November):** A culinary week featuring international chefs, tasting menus, and collaborations across the island's top restaurants and resorts.

# What to do in St. Barths



Image courtesy of Cheval Blanc St-Barth

St. Barths offers a mix of beautiful beaches, delicious dining, and crystal-clear waters perfect for exploration and relaxation.

## Outdoor activities

- **Beaches:** Unwind on the pristine sands of Colombier Beach, reached by a scenic hike or boat ride. Stretch out at Saline Beach, but look out for nude sunbathers.
- **Yacht charter:** Enjoy the waters around St. Barths, stopping at hidden beaches and prime snorkeling spots.
- **Sunset cruise:** Set sail on a private or group outing to watch the sun set over the ocean with cocktails and light bites.
- **Diving:** Explore vibrant coral reefs, swim alongside colorful fish, and spot sea turtles in their natural habitat at Pain de Sucre and Île Coco.

## Shopping

- **Luxury designers:** Explore the chic stores lining Gustavia's "rue du Couturier," home to brands like Louis Vuitton, Hermès, and Cartier.
- **Boutique clothing:** Find beachwear and breezy island looks with upscale flair at shops like Poupette St Barth, Lolita Jaca, Calypso St. Barth, and Kiwi.
- **Watches and jewelry:** Find global designer boutiques like Rolex and Bvlgari, plus local gems like Bijoux de la Mer, Voila St. Barth, and Fabienne Miot.
- **Art and design galleries:** For standout pieces, drop into Space Gallery, Eden Gallery, and Clic for contemporary art, island-inspired décor, and curated objects.
- **Children's clothing:** Les Petits Carréaux offers stylish, upscale wardrobe finds for younger shoppers.
- **Beauty products:** Pick up luxurious skincare and spa products at Ligne.

## Where to eat in St. Barths



Image courtesy of Shellona at the Hotel Barrière Le Carl Gustaf St Barth

St. Barths' dining scene combines French sophistication with Caribbean flair, offering everything from chic beachfront bistros to intimate gourmet hideaways.

## Beach clubs

St. Barths' beach clubs are legendary, with lunch typically unfolding in two waves. An early seating around noon offers a laid-back, sun-soaked atmosphere. The later 2 p.m. slot transforms into a spirited party scene.

- **Nikki Beach (Saint-Jean):** The island's iconic Sunday hotspot, combining DJ sets, poolside lounging, and cocktails, perfect for a lively, social atmosphere.
- **Gyp Sea Beach Club (Saint-Jean):** A bohemian, relaxed escape on Pelican Beach with a casual weekend lunch scene best enjoyed on Saturdays.
- **Nao Beach Club (Saint-Jean):** Chic yet low-key weekday retreat, ideal for brunch or sunset drinks on the sand, and stylish loungers overlooking calm waters.
- **La Guérite (Saint-Jean):** A vibrant seaside spot serving French cuisine and fresh seafood, offering a festive energy best enjoyed on Wednesdays.
- **Shellona (Gustavia):** Owned by the Carl Gustaf crew, Shellona is perfect for a long, leisurely lunch and panoramic bay views any day of the week.

## Casual and local eats

- **Eddy's Ghetto (Saint-Jean):** A laid-back spot for fresh Caribbean seafood, served in a friendly, colorful setting.
- **L'isoletta (Gustavia):** A cozy wood-fired pizza restaurant offering thin-crust classics and inventive toppings, tucked into the heart of town.
- **Le Select (Gustavia):** A divey, old-school eatery with a loyal following, serving up casual bites in a no-frills, welcoming space.
- **Fish Corner (Saint-Jean):** A popular waterfront seafood spot, ideal for a quick, flavorful lunch with a view.
- **Black Ginger (Saint-Jean):** Casual yet lively Asian-fusion joint serving up bold flavors in a colorful, relaxed setting.
- **Jojo Burger (Saint-Jean):** A friendly, informal spot that's great for a casual midday meal or snack.
- **Colombier Bakery (Colombier/Flamands area):** A charming bakery offering freshly baked pastries, breads, and coffee.

## Fine dining

- **L'Isola (Gustavia):** Elegant Italian-inspired cuisine served in a refined yet approachable atmosphere.

- **Sella (Gustavia):** Contemporary French cuisine with locally sourced ingredients, offering a chic, intimate setting.
- **Bonito Saint Barth (Gustavia):** A sophisticated French-Latin fusion restaurant on a sunset-facing terrace with harbor views.
- **Le Tamarin (Flamands area):** Southeast Asian-inspired cuisine with inventive plating and a serene, romantic ambiance in the jungle.
- **Kinugawa (Gustavia):** Sleek Japanese-fusion dining in a chic harborfront location.
- **Bagatelle (Gustavia):** A lively yet refined French Mediterranean spot, combining beautifully plated dishes, a festive atmosphere, and Caribbean flair.
- **La Petite Plage (Saint-Jean):** A beachfront fine-dining experience perfect for enjoying a sunset view over calm waters.

## Nightlife

- **Yacht Club (Gustavia):** A sophisticated lounge with harbor views, crafted cocktails, and a chic crowd.
- **Beefbar St. Barth (Gustavia):** A stylish steakhouse and bar, known for prime cuts, elegant plating, and evening ambiance.
- **Le Ti St. Barth Bar (Flamands area):** Iconic for its fun, lively vibe, tropical cocktails, and live music.
- **Bar La Petite Plage (Saint-Jean):** A casual beachfront bar for sunset drinks and light bites in a relaxed atmosphere.

## Trips to add on



From laid-back luxury to cultural exploration, these nearby islands complement St. Barths' sophistication seamlessly.

**St. Martin/Sint Maarten (15 min flight or 45 min ferry):** This dual-nation island fuses French sophistication with Dutch vibrancy. Spend days on beach clubs and markets, and nights savoring fine cuisine in Grand Case or vibrant nightlife in Simpson Bay.

**Anguilla (45 min ferry or 15 min flight):** A serene contrast to St. Barths, with powder-soft beaches, turquoise lagoons, and a relaxed, barefoot atmosphere. Perfect for beach-hopping, fine dining, and unwinding in understated Caribbean luxury.

**Saba (15 min flight or 1.5 hr boat):** An untouched volcanic jewel known for green mountains, diving sites, and eco-friendly charm. Hike the Cloud Forest Trail or explore colorful underwater reefs for an adventurous off-the-grid getaway.

**Puerto Rico (1 hr flight):** A lively blend of culture, history, and nature, from the cobblestone streets of Old San Juan to rainforest trails in El Yunque. Enjoy salsa-filled nights, coffee farm

tours, and a thriving culinary scene.

# If not St. Barths...



Image courtesy of 7Pines Resort Sardinia

For glamour and island rhythm, these destinations offer a similar blend of beauty, culture, and indulgence to St. Barths.

**Mykonos, Greece:** Whitewashed villages, turquoise waters, and a cosmopolitan nightlife define this Aegean gem. Spend sun-drenched days at beach clubs like Scorpios or Paraga, then wander through Mykonos Town's maze of boutiques and seaside tavernas.

**St. Tropez, France:** Glamour meets Riviera charm on the Côte d'Azur, where golden beaches, luxury yachts, and designer boutiques set the tone. Mingle at Pampelonne Beach or sip rosé at a café overlooking the port for a timeless dose of French seaside style.

**Sardinia, Italy:** A Mediterranean masterpiece with emerald waters and rugged coastline. Lounge on the sands of Costa Smeralda, explore ancient villages, or dine on fresh seafood and

local Vermentino for an Italian escape that feels both exclusive and unspoiled.

**Mustique, St. Vincent and the Grenadines:** A private island retreat defined by tranquility and understated elegance. Days unfold between pristine beaches, coastal walks, and sunset gatherings in Britannia Bay, where barefoot luxury and privacy reign supreme.

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