

IT'S THE CARIBBEAN... BUT NOT AS YOU KNOW IT

Looking for winter sun inspiration? Who better to guide you than these 50 West Indies aficionados. Here, they exclusively reveal to *High Life* their secret haunts – from the *only* place for conch salad in the Bahamas to Mustique's most secluded lagoons

ST VINCENT AND GRENADINES

'You won't find Happy Island on maps of the Grenadines, partly because this speck of an islet is too small to count, but mostly because it's a construct: the creation of Rasta bar owner Janti, who built it with his own hands from conch shells in the middle of Clifton Harbour, near Union Island's diminutive airport. Accessible only by dinghy and popular with yachties after a day out exploring the sublime Tobago Cays, it's *the* place for a sunset rum punch and, if you're in luck, a grilled lobster dinner.'

Claire Wrathall *travel writer*

'From Petit St Vincent, ask local Carl to take you aboard his boat *My Decision*, along with your snorkelling gear and picnic, to the tiny offshore sandbar known locally as Petit St Richardson – one small ring of sand, complete with an umbrella, bottle opener and nothing else. The waters boast some of the finest diving in the Caribbean with uninhabited cays fringed with sugar-white beaches.'

Sarah Siese *travel writer and author*

British Airways flies to Antigua from London Gatwick and on to St Vincent with Liat. BA offers seven nights in St Vincent and Grenadines from £1,999 per person for travel during 5 January-27 March. Includes return flights from Gatwick and five-star all-inclusive accommodation, based on two sharing. Visit ba.com/caribbean or call +44 (0)844 493 0758.



THE BAHAMAS

'What you have to do is to get invited to David Copperfield's spectacular Musha Cay (mushacay.com), where he has acquired 12 little islands. Close to one of the islands, at low tide, a sandbank is exposed making a beach in the middle of the ocean. As I was born in Trinidad, I thought I was quite immune to stupendously beautiful beaches, but this place is so sensational it's almost otherworldly.'

Sir Trevor McDonald *broadcaster and presenter of ITV's The Secret Caribbean*

'Harbour Island is only three miles long and half a mile wide. Wander into "town" for breakfast at The Dunmore Deli (+1 242 333 2644), then walk it off by heading up to The Sand Dollar Shop (+1 242 367 4405) where you can find locally made treasures, including little bottles of pink sand, which you can take home to prove it really does exist. In the afternoon, rent a boat from Duke, snorkel for sand dollars and sea biscuits, and then head to Bottom Harbour to watch the turtles and dolphins. You can also take a trip with Captain Bob who lives on the neighbouring island, Current. He will take you diving for conch or spear fishing. For a late afternoon snack, head to The Queen Conch shack near the PLP dock. It's here the local conch salad is made. The conch is pulled from its shell, chopped and mixed with the juice of limes and sour orange, local tomatoes, onions and green peppers. Ask for tourist strength – anything else will blow your bikini off.'

India Hicks *interior designer (sugarmillbyindiahicks.com)*

'Hire a boat from Governor's Dock on Harbour Island and go turtle spotting. Remember to take a cool bag filled with ice-cold Kalik (the local beer). There is only one place for lunch – Sip Sip (+1 242 333 3316). Tip the hostess and try not to drink too many Goombay Smash >

Hey, Mr Blue Sky

The utopian island of Petit St Richardson, St Vincent and Grenadines; making a splash on Harbour Island, the Bahamas (opposite)

Insider knowledge

cocktails while you wait for a table. The best place to see the sunset is Romora Bay – Thursday night is their night for sundowners.'

Heidi Klein *swimwear designer*

'The most important island is New Providence, on which the capital Nassau is situated. Visit the Straw Market in downtown Bay Street. Straw vending is one of the country's oldest industries and with the sun beating down all day, a wide brimmed hat should be top of your shopping list.'

Momma Cherri *chef and restaurateur*

'Sunday afternoon in West End on the island of Grand Bahama offers an authentic Bahamian experience. This oceanfront settlement has charm, genuine hospitality and the freshest seafood imaginable. Don't be fooled by the unassuming appearance of local eatery Chicken Nest (cbc.cc), where you can enjoy a made-to-order conch salad, as well as other island specialities. The sounds of rake-and-scrape music, and a glass of Switcha (a local limeade) at one of the food stands is a great way to cap a hectic week.'

Benjamin Davis *general manager, Grand Lucayan Hotel*

BA flies to Nassau from London Heathrow. BA offers seven nights in Bahamas from £1,169 per person for travel during 5 January-27 March. Includes return flights from Heathrow and three-and-a-half star accommodation only, based on two sharing. Visit ba.com/bahamas or call +44 (0)844 493 0758.



ANGUILLA

'If you're craving sunny seclusion, you can't beat Nat Richardson's Palm Grove Bar & Grill (+1 264 497 4224). The open-air shack sits on a stretch of beach known as Junk's Hole, a winding, bumpy ride down a potholed road. Order the house ribs or a grilled local lobster with a side of steaming johnnycakes and an icy Carib beer. Strap on your snorkel and mask and float in the shallow waters of Savannah Bay until your lobster is done – you might have the pale blue sea to yourself. It's a castaway fantasy, complete with great grub and genuine island bonhomie.'

Alexis Lipsitz Flippin *author of Frommer's St Maarten/ St Martin, Anguilla & St Barts*

BA flies to Antigua from London Gatwick and onto Anguilla with Liat.

JAMAICA

'I've been going to Cane River since I was a boy. Once you've scrambled through caves and rock formations you come to a big waterfall. We go to cool off, eat, drink and laugh. With all the rocks and the trees it feels like you've stepped back in time to the way the earth was before man spoilt it.'

Ziggy Marley *musician*

'If you want to see the roots of Jamaica head to Pinnacle in St Catherine. It's where Leonard Howell, the first Rasta, set up a commune. It's a bit of a climb but worth it for the panoramic view of Kingston. It's the birthplace of Rastafarianism and the place to go to try to understand it.'

Benjamin Zephaniah *poet*

'Montego Bay has the most fantastic sunsets. Because the island has a southern decline from Rose Hall to the Hanover border, you almost seem to see the curvature of the earth. Whatever the geophysics involved, the view is spectacular.'

Anthony Johnson *Jamaican High Commissioner, London*

'Take a trip to the Bath Fountain in the hills of St Thomas – Bob Marley was a regular visitor. It's said the waters, flowing from volcanic wells, can cure all ailments. A path leads to a gorge with mountains dripping with fruit on either side. Here an iron pipe sticks out, from which gushes hot water. Underneath, people do a jig as the liquid hits their skin.'

Levi Roots *entrepreneur and musician*

'I love taking Goldeneye guests to Firefly for drinks at sunset. Firefly was Noël Coward's mountaintop home in Port Maria. When he was there, the entire world came to see him – Errol Flynn, Sean Connery, Laurence Olivier, Elizabeth Taylor, and even the Queen Mother, when she visited Jamaica in 1965.'

Chris Blackwell *founder of Island Outpost and Island Records*

'I am never happier than when I'm killing time in the west end of Negril, probably enjoying a Red Stripe at The Rockhouse Hotel (rockhousehotel.com). No glamour, no pretence, just soaking up the undiluted Jamaican vibe.'

Paul Cleary *managing director of Caribtours*

'There is a place called Booby Cay Island, home to special birds of the same name. Tourists come on glass-bottomed boats to admire the beautiful coral, fish and sea stars. The birds only come out at evening, when the tourists are gone.'

Lee 'Scratch' Perry *musician*

BA flies to Kingston from Gatwick. BA offers seven nights in Jamaica from £799 pp for travel during 5 January-27 March. Includes return flights from Gatwick. Visit ba.com/jamaica or call +44 (0)844 493 0758. >*

Peace in our time
The view from Noël Coward's Jamaican residence, Firefly; kick back with a Goombay Smash cocktail at Sip Sip on Harbour Island, the Bahamas (left)





meet Elaine, at her Fig Tree Culture Shop, where she will regale you with stories. Nearby is Wallings Dam, built over 300 years ago by the Brits to bring water to the plantations. Everyone I take on this trip is enchanted by what Antigua has to offer away from the beaches.'

Rob Sherman *managing director of Curtain Bluff resort*

'Spend a few days at Carlisle Bay resort (campbellgrayhotels.com). Walk to breakfast listening to the waves crash on the beach. I spent several days there with my then-girlfriend, now wife. On the third day I organised a picnic on a nearby island. We spent the morning swimming. Afterwards, I poured us a piping hot cuppa and fell onto one knee to ask, "Will you marry me?" It makes me smile to think about it.'

Ben Fogle *adventurer*

'Antigua has so many characters. At Carlisle Bay we have an amazing guy called Prince. He is one of 15 children and is a windsurfing champion. The guests love him and he has taught so many of them the sport – both children and oldies alike. Then there is Gwendolyn, a larger-than-life character who sells her beautiful jewellery from a little shack on our beach. This is the Caribbean – utterly laidback.'

Gordon Campbell Gray *hotelier*

'If it's sun, sea and sand you are after, then head to Half Moon Bay – it's breathtaking. Check out the creole food at the Larder on Friars Hill Road (thelarderantigua.com). They sometimes bring in different chefs from around the world. Recently they had an incredible sushi chef – it was like being in Osaka.'

Jazzie B *singer/songwriter*

British Airways flies to Antigua from London Gatwick. BA offers seven nights in Antigua from £749 per person for travel during 5 January-27 March. Includes return flights from Gatwick and three-star accommodation only, based on two sharing. Visit ba.com/antigua or call +44 (0)844 493 0758.

ANTIGUA

'Charter a boat and take a leisurely cruise past Nelson's Dockyard and English Harbour to Green Island. It's tiny, with great swimming and snorkelling. Pack a picnic and enjoy the sun, sand and sea.'

Baroness Amos *politician*

'One of my favourite places to stay is a secluded and spectacularly beautiful beach resort called Curtain Bluff (curtainbluff.com). If you visit, you'll discover exactly why I've tried to keep this place secret for so long.'

Norman Jay *DJ*

'Have a drink and order fresh seafood at Shirley Heights Lookout Bar (shirleyheightslookout.com). Down below, you'll see yachts bobbing about in English Harbour. It's usually peaceful but comes to life on a Sunday night when there is live entertainment. Sometimes I play there with my band, Spirited. It's a great party.'

Curtly Ambrose *former cricketer and musician*

'The best way to see the island's vibrant interior is to motor along Fig Tree Drive. Begin at Folly Hill, where you will come across Fig Tree Studio Art Gallery (figtreestudioart.com), owned by local Rasta Dasa Spencer and his artist wife Sallie Harker. Nestled among the bananas, figs, coconuts and royal palms, it is both their home and studio, self-built in pure Caribbean colours and design. Further up the road, you will

Living it up
Shirley Heights Lookout Bar, an Antigua nightspot; musicians outside Santiago de Cuba's La Casa de la Trova club (right)



CUBA

'When I need a break from work, I take my guitar to Russian's Beach. It's a beautiful non-touristy place with great views of the sea. This beach is almost unknown to people outside of the community and does not appear in any guides.'

Juan de Marcos González *bandleader, Buena Vista Social Club and Afro Cuban All Stars*

'I recommend La Casa de la Trova (lacasadelatroya.net) to anyone visiting Santiago de Cuba. Located on Heredia Street, it's where you'll find traditional Cuban music at its best.'

Eliades Ochoa *guitarist and singer, Buena Vista Social Club*

BA flies from London Heathrow and City to Madrid and Barcelona and then on to Havana with Iberia. Visit ba.com. >

BARBADOS

'Foul Bay beach is ideal for hanging out away from the crowds. Then head to Scarlet in Paynes Bay (+1 246 432 3663) or Ramshackles in Mount Standfast (+1 246 422 1974) for a cocktail. Nancy's Rum Shop serves great fried chicken.'

Jemma Kidd *make-up artist*

'Visit the oldest distillery in the world, the Mount Gay Rum Distillery in Bridgetown (mountgayrum.com). For the perfect finish to a day, unwind at Sandy Lane Hotel (sandylane.com).'

Chesterfield-Browne *mixologist*

'If I have guests I make a point of driving them to the east coast where the sea is rough and beautiful. You need to hire a car to get there but it is well worth it. Visit one of these great restaurants, The Cove (+1 246 433 9495), The Round House (roundhousebarbados.com) and The Atlantis (atlantishotelbarbados.com), and order Bajan food. My favourite dish is flying fish pâté with red fruit chips.'

Sir Cliff Richard *singer*

'We love rum punch at Cutters (cutters.bb) before body surfing on Crane beach. Pop into the Fish Pot, a restaurant in Little Good Harbour (littlegoodharbourbarbados.com).'

Karen and Wayne Capaldi *owners of Coral Reef Club*

'Go to Miami Beach – it's relatively unknown. Afterwards, order a sundowner at JoJo's, an old shack-style cocktail bar.'

Sean Harrington *managing director of Elemis*

BA flies to Bridgetown from London Gatwick. BA offers seven nights in Barbados from £799 pp for travel during 27 January-5 March. Includes return flights and three nights accommodation. Visit ba.com/Jamaica or call +44 (0)844 493 0758.*

ST BARTS

'It is a long walk to Grande Saline Beach but definitely worth it. I also love to picnic on idyllic Gouverneur Beach. And the Port at New Year, with all the boats' lights shining, is magical.'

Tamara Mellon *CEO of Jimmy Choo*

'On the Rocks at Eden Rock (edenrockhotel.com) is still one of my favourite places. It's a spot to relax after a day spent on my motorbike. The beauty of St Barts is that it is safe – so safe that I can park my bike anywhere with the keys left in.'

David Matthews *owner of Eden Rock Hotel*

BA flies to Antigua and then onto St Barts with Liat.



TOBAGO

'Tobago Harvest Festival runs all year, but is particularly exciting over Easter weekend around Mount Pleasant and Buccoo. Look out for the goat and crab racing. Thanksgiving meals are open to friends, family and even strangers.'

Hasan Defour *chef*

BA flies to Tobago from London Gatwick. BA offers seven nights in Tobago from £749 per person for travel during 5 January-27 March. Includes return flights from Gatwick and three-star accommodation only, based on two sharing. Visit ba.com/tobago or call +44 (0)844 493 0758.

ST LUCIA

'Try Miss Theresa's bakery in the main town of Soufrière. Christina and her daughter make bread using a very old concrete oven. Nothing flash or fancy, just a plain white loaf. But it smells delicious coming out of the oven. They also make mixed-spice biscuits, which are to die for.'

Tom Aikens *chef*

'Go for Sunday breakfast at the 150-year-old Pink Plantation House, located above the city of Castries on Morne Fortune. The wooden architecture, views, authentic creole cuisine and warm hospitality will ensure you want to linger.'

Jennifer Atkinson *CEO of TTC Classics*

BA flies to St Lucia from London Gatwick. BA offers seven nights in St Lucia from £799 per person for travel during 5 January-27 March. Includes return flights from Gatwick and three-star accommodation only, based on two sharing. Visit ba.com/stlucia or call +44 (0)844 493 0758. >

Night and day

The Fish Pot restaurant at Little Good Harbour and surf-pounded Crane Beach (below) – just two Barbados highlights





Sea life
 Diving in Little Cayman; cocktail supping at Basil's Bar on Mustique (below)

THE CAYMAN ISLANDS

'I was born and raised in Grand Cayman, where tourists typically flock to Seven Mile Beach. But if you're looking for somewhere different, visit Cayman Kai at the other end of the island. Go to Rum Point and look out to the sea, turn left and keep walking south. It's a quaint, quiet beach.'

Tanya Streeter *freediver and environmentalist*

'Bloody Bay Wall and Jackson's Reef, off Little Cayman, remain some of my favourite dive sites for the sheer pleasure of heading over the reef edge and dropping into the darkening blue depths.'

Tim Ecott *scuba expert and author of Neutral Buoyancy: Adventures in a Liquid World (£9.99, Penguin)*

BA flies to Grand Cayman from London Heathrow. BA offers seven nights in The Cayman Islands from £1,249 pp during 5 January-27 March. Includes return flights and accommodation. Visit ba.com/caymanislands or call +44 (0)844 493 0758.

GRENADA

'To the north is a vigorous sea fed by the Atlantic Ocean. Unlike the famous Grand Anse Beach in St George's, ebbing and flowing with the waves of the Caribbean Sea, Bathway Beach offers a more adventurous and secluded experience. Immerse yourself in the countryside at hideaway villa High Hopes (spiceparadise.net/highhopes). With the trade winds whipping up the spices of Grenada, it is a slice of paradise.'

Oneika Phillips *actress*

'Unique to Grenada is Pappy's Bar on the road to Gouyave. Honoured with a British Empire Medal, Pappy makes all his drinks from local ingredients. For those in the know, his under-the-counter drink, bois bande, is a potent and long-lasting aphrodisiac! I stop by regularly.'

Peter de Savary *entrepreneur*

BA flies to Grenada from London Gatwick. BA offers seven nights in Grenada from £799 per person for travel during 5 January-27 March. Includes return flights from Gatwick and three-star accommodation only, based on two sharing. Visit ba.com/grenada or call +44 (0)844 493 0758.

ST MAARTEN

'When in St Maarten, don't miss the tiny island of Pinel, accessible only by a short ferry trip. With its powdery sand, turquoise water and gorgeous views over the hills of St Maarten, it's the most beautiful beach I have ever seen. Take a day trip and arrive hungry – Pinel has two beach bars, great for fresh fish and local cocktails.'

Laurel Greatrix *UK communications manager at TripAdvisor*

BA flies to Antigua from London Gatwick and onto St Maarten with Liat.

MUSTIQUE

'We go to North Point, via a dirt track near L'Ansecoy Bay, to watch the sunset on Sunday evenings with jugs of chilled rum punch and bowls of toasted coconut or plantain wrapped in crispy bacon.'

Belle Robinson *co-owner of Jigsaw*

'Basil's Bar (basilsbar.com) is still my favourite place to enjoy a cocktail at sunset. The best-kept secret is the lagoons. Reserve a beach hut at Lagoon Two – it's the ideal spot for a Sunday picnic.'

Basil Charles *owner of Basil's Bar*

BA flies to Barbados from London Gatwick and onto Mustique via Grenadine Airways. >



Photograph: Corbis; Jean-Marc Lecerf/Hoa-Quil/Eyedea/Camera Press London. *Includes three-star accommodation only and based on two sharing

TURKS AND CAICOS

'I first visited Parrot Cay in 1999 when Christina Ong opened Como Shambhala (parrotcay.com.bz). All the elements I love are there – beach, turquoise water, foliage.'

Donna Karan *designer*

'Middle Caicos is a gem. Take friends to the tiny restaurant Daniel's Café by the Sea (+1 649 232 6132). On the menu is whatever they have caught that day.'

Crawford Sherman *general manager of Parrot Cay*

BA flies to Providenciales from London Heathrow. BA offers seven nights in Turks and Caicos from £1,999 pp for travel during 5 January-27 March. Includes return flights and five-star all-inclusive accommodation, based on two sharing. Visit ba.com/turksandcaicos or call +44 (0)844 493 0758.



Set your own pace

The Bomba Shack on Tortola, British Virgin Islands; the serene Parrot Cay private island, Turks and Caicos (above right)

BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

'Bomba Shack in Capoon's Bay, Tortola, is unusual by any standards. It began life as a hangout for surfers in the 70s. Since then, visitors from around the world have stopped by to watch the action. They've also been encouraged by Bomba, the ever-welcoming proprietor, to leave something he can remember them by – a graffiti message scrawled on the wall, or, better still, an item of clothing. The result is a bar like no other, with a cacophony of colour, flotsam and trinkets tucked into every cranny. . . and decades' worth of T-shirts and knickers hanging from the rafters.'

Alex Dick-Reid *editor of The Surfer's Path*

BA flies to Beef Island from London Gatwick via Antigua, Barbados and San Juan.

DOMINICA

'The Indian River Bush Bar and Restaurant was built by hand using natural and reusable materials, including plants and flowers. When Oprah Winfrey visited, she was amazed – she didn't expect such a cool bar in the middle of the jungle.'

Andrew 'Cobra' O'Brien *Cobra Tours*

'The Papillote Wilderness Retreat in Rouseau (papillote.dm) feels like the Garden of Eden. There are trails through magical rainforest gardens, waterfalls and hot mineral pools you can bathe in after hiking up to the incredible "boiling lake".'

Jane Dunford *deputy editor of High Life*

BA flies to Antigua and then onto Dominica with Liat.

ST KITTS AND NEVIS

'Experience Sunday Champagne Brunch at the Royal Palm restaurant in St Kitts (ottleys.com). The atmosphere is laid-back and the ambiance is low-key. There's not a bad seat in the house, with beautiful views in all directions.'

Claire Buckland *destination manager at BA Holidays*

'Sunshine's on Pinney's Beach (+1 869 469 5817) in Nevis is the coolest chill-out place in the Caribbean, with great music, spicy snacks and the legendary Killer Bee cocktail. It's a rum punch of exceptional strength; the exact ingredients are, as you'd imagine, a closely guarded secret.'

Chris Caldico *photographer and travel writer*

'Nevis Peak is an almost vertical climb that takes a few hours. Afterwards, head for the nearby baths, heated from the volcano you just climbed. This naturally heated water can be as hot as 110°F. Heavenly relaxation after an amazing climb.'

Tim Hoffman *owner of Montpelier Plantation & Beach*

'I love Mango restaurant on the beach at the Four Seasons Resort Nevis (fourseasons.com). The spiny lobster salad and chargrilled white fish (you can see the fishermen's boats from the restaurant) and Nevisian lamb curry with okra were our favourites. Another place I recommend is Rocks at the Golden Rock Inn (golden-rock.com).'

John Cleese *actor*

BA flies to St Kitts from London Gatwick. BA offers seven nights in St Kitts and Nevis from £879 per person for travel during 5 January-27 March. Includes flights and accommodation. Visit ba.com/stkitts or call +44 (0)844 493 0758. For details of all flights, visit ba.com – look out for the BA January sale. ■

