

Cream of the crop

Barbados is the place to party during its summer carnival - just don't expect to keep up with the locals, says Aby Dunsby

@AbraDunsby

There must be enough rum punch in here to fill an Olympic pool. I'm one of the thousands of revellers sipping the potent blend as we wait for the next act to come onstage at the One Love concert in Barbados, one of many events that precedes the country's colourful, jubilant and wonderfully raucous carnival.

We'd been hearing rumours about Bajan superstar Rihanna performing, but instead, a diminutive, grey-moustachioed man appears on stage wearing a flowery shirt and a Cheshire Cat grin.

Small he may be, but we quickly realise why the calypso star has been dubbed 'the mighty Gynner' as he darts around the stage, flailing his arms, shimmying his hips and belting out tunes with a raw energy and enthusiasm that belie his 70 years.

The crowd's response is pure exuberance: fervent dancing, flag-waving and rum glugging, which we're only too happy to

join in with. Hours later, when we leave with aching feet and groggy heads, the concert is still going strong. The Bajan revellers have out-partied us - and not for the first time.

▶ PARTY PEOPLE

If sun-blessed Barbados conjures up images of swaying palms, brilliant-blue waters and heavenly resorts, you're only seeing half the story. This is also an island with fantastic food, a rich history, and a jam-packed calendar of festivals and events that allows the life-loving locals to let loose, whether they're one or 101.

For clients who love to party, there's no better time to visit Barbados than for its carnival; a riotous, rum-drenched celebration that gives Rio, New Orleans and nearby Trinidad a run for their money. Bajans call their annual summer carnival Crop Over: the name dates back to 1780, when it was a celebration for slaves to mark the end of harvesting the sugar cane

TOP TIP
For clients who struggle in the heat, suggest partying at Foreday Morning, which starts in the evening



PICTURES: BARBADOS TOURISM/MARKO MEDIA; CATHY CUMMINS; ANDREW HULSHMEER; ADRIAN RICHARDS

RIGHT: Revellers at Grand Kadooment



PICTURE: ROCKWELL/FAVOURIS



Caribtours offers a week all-inclusive at Turtle Beach by Elegant Hotels for £2,059, based on two sharing a Junior Suite. Price is based on travel on July 25, 2017, and includes return flights, private transfers and use of a UK airport lounge. Book by September 30. caribtours.co.uk

Travel 2 has seven nights' all-inclusive at Discovery Bay by Rex Resorts in Barbados from £1,139 per person, with Virgin Atlantic flights from London, for travel between June 1 and August 31, 2017. travel2.com

➔ crop. It has since evolved into the island's biggest national festival, with flocks of emigrants and tourists flying out to celebrate.

The eight-week-long build-up is just as important as the epic carnival parade, Grand Kadooment, which always takes place on the first Monday in August. Make sure clients fly in early enough to catch some of the



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pre-celebrations, when the island is abuzz with parties, parades, dance competitions and soca music, a genre of calypso that is very much the soundtrack to carnival.

Fuelling the party, of course, is rum – and lots of it. Barbados is the birthplace of the famed spirit, and clients can drink it in the hotel bars, in the hundreds of colourful rum shops that pepper the island, or on a Mount Gay rum tour, which takes guests through the history of the rum industry, followed by a tasting.

▶ DANCING 'TIL DAWN

Miley Cyrus has some explaining to do. The popstar may have managed to get 'twerking' into the dictionary, but the dance trend she started is not new.

"Bajans were dancing like that long before anyone had even heard about twerking," I'm told by the brilliant Barbados tourism (BTMI) director, Cheryl Carter. In Barbados, it's called wukking up, and it's all about bending your knees and gyrating your hips rhythmically as though they're entirely separate to the rest of your body.

If it sounds saucy, it is, and it's also very difficult to master, as we discover for ourselves when we have our very own wuk-up class in preparation for Crop Over. Let's just say we got full marks for effort. For all its steaminess, wukking up is done in the name of fun, and clients can choose to partake enthusiastically or not at all – no one will bat an eyelid either way.

Clients can try out their



LEFT: Steel band at Crop Over



Wear clothes that can be thrown away - the tradition is for people to cover each other in mud, chocolate and body paint

➔ newly-acquired moves at Foreday Morning Jam, a giant, free nighttime street party where thousands of locals and tourists jam behind music trucks until the sun comes up. If they're joining in, tell clients to wear clothes they don't mind throwing away - the tradition is for people to cover each other in mud, chocolate and body paint.



ASK THE EXPERT



Malcolm Davies, product manager, Funway Holidays

"Although the summer months are considered to be 'off-season' in the Caribbean, there are plenty of reasons why this is the ideal time to visit. In fact, July and August are great to recommend to clients because this is when the locals come out to play at the many local festivals being held.

One of the best of these is the wildly exuberant Crop Over festival held over eight weeks in Barbados, when visitors can enjoy the colourful parades, steel-pan music, dancing and plenty of local food and drink that turn this small island into the ultimate Caribbean party location."

▶ CARNIVAL FEVER

"Sleep later", reads a T-shirt I spot on one local, and that cheery determination to keep on celebrating is echoed by most of the Bajans I meet. My own weariness dissipates as soon as we arrive for Grand Kadooment, the carnival closing parade, a sensory delight with its wonderful cacophony of colour, music, rum and skimpy, feathery outfits bedecked in sequins.

Clients can choose to watch the glorious parade from the roadside, or they can pay to 'jump' with one of the many bands, which means donning a glittery costume for the

✔ Tried & Tested

Sandals Barbados

Located in the lively area of St Lawrence Gap, this all-inclusive resort is ideal for luxury-loving couples, offering top-notch service, 280 beautiful rooms and the option of a Butler Elite service. Clients can choose to dine at one of 11 restaurants, enjoy unlimited scuba diving and water sports, indulge in a treatment at the Red Lane Spa, or watch the sunset from the outdoor bathtub in their suite. Rooms from £428 per night. sellingsandals.co.uk



Elegant Resorts Turtle Beach

This all-suite, all-inclusive caters well for families and comes with a children's pool, organised activities and a free club for kids aged three to 12. Rooms are light and breezy with Caribbean prints, and boast excellent views of the gardens, swimming pools and beach. The revamped Aqua School offers free surfing and paddle-boarding lessons, and there's authentic Bajan entertainment in the evenings. Rooms from £295 per night. turtlebeachresortbarbados.com



girls, and colourful shorts for the boys, and spending the day dancing with fellow revellers, accompanied by the pumping rhythm of the soca beats. Being allowed to join in gives Crop Over an edge over other carnivals: in

Rio and New Orleans, for example, you have to be invited to join a band.

If clients want to jump, suggest they join one of the first bands, which means they'll set off early and complete the parade before the heat of the afternoon sun kicks in. Two of the biggest and best bands are Zulu, which Rihanna and Lewis Hamilton both jumped with last year, and the new Aura Experience, which we spot a beaming Lewis partying with this year. The parade finishes at Spring Garden near a two-mile stretch of beach, which plenty of carnival-goers dunk into to cool down, feathers and all.

From our BTMI stand on the roadside, we sing along to the infectious tracks that have now become familiar, and raise our glasses to the rainbow wave of colourful outfits that glint and dance in front of us, donned by tourists and locals, men and women, young and old, fat and thin. Crop Over is partying at its most unruly, uninhibited and unpretentious, and it sums up the sunny spirit of the Bajans perfectly.



LEFT: Dancing in the street

