CARIBBEAN BARBADOS DESTINATIONS

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Barbados is a big hit with Brits, finds David Golledge on a trade fam

A contract of the seabed. The rusting wreck teems with an incredible array of brightly coloured tropical fish that dart around in front of your eyes.

A dream for divers and snorkellers, Carlisle Bay has six shipwrecks in close proximity, yet they are by no means the only underwater attractions. Nearby, we encounter turtles relaxed enough to share their home with excited onlookers, and on a good day, you can spot green turtles and even the occasional hawksbill.

Back on deck, the view is no less spectacular, as we sail along the calm waters of Barbados's Platinum Coast before dropping anchor outside the uber-exclusive Sandy Lane, drinking in the same sunset view the likes of Bajan megastar Rihanna enjoys at home.

Despite its popularity with A-listers such as Lewis Hamilton and Simon Cowell, Barbados is by no means limited to the →



Oistins Fish Fry is a Friday institution. Choose from freshly grilled tuna, swordfish, red snapper and other dishes from dozens of stalls, washed down with rum punch, and party late into the night.

Dine under the stars at **Cocktail Kitchen's** rooftop bar, set above the hubbub of St Lawrence Gap. A varied international restaurant menu includes tasty bar snacks and an even more extensive choice of cocktails.

The Crane Hotel's Zen Restaurant offers exquisite Thai-Japanese dining from a clifftop vantage point overlooking the rugged southeast coast.

top of the market. UK visitors not only account for 35% of arrivals, they also tend to stay the longest and spend the most, meaning clients can expect a warm Bajan welcome. With a mix of stunning beaches, home comforts and authentic culture, it's not hard to understand the enduring British affinity with the island.

Its action-packed calendar ranges from horse racing at the Barbados Gold Cup to festivals celebrating open-water swimming, music, rally driving or rugby sevens, yet the event of the year is undoubtedly Crop Over. Originally a celebration of the end of the sugar cane harvest, it has evolved into a rum-fuelled carnival of calypso bands, extravagant outfits and twerklike dancing, which starts building in May, culminating in Grand Kadooment on the first Monday in August.

Rum-drinking isn't confined to Crop Over, though. West Indian International Tours takes us to rum shops ranging from colourful wooden hangout The Bush Bar in Pile Bay to large and lively party bar The Flash Zone. All are sociable spots; it's normal to buy rum by the bottle and share it around, feasting on unfussy barbecue fare and swaying to the soca rhythms. We end the night at De Yard Bar and let loose on the karaoke – but not before checking out the island's hotels.



BEST FOR... FAMILIES

Stay at: Sugar Bay Barbados Find it: South coast Sell it: This bright and breezy all-inclusive embodies 'boho-chic', set on a wide sandy beach that is one of the island's main turtle nesting areas. Tasteful contemporary local artworks are dotted around communal areas, while each of the 138 rooms is decked out with quirky features.

Dining choices include the adult-only Asian option Umi, smart Sizzle Steakhouse and relaxed beachfront buffet Reef Restaurant.

The secluded Karma Spa offers a range of rejuvenating treatments, and for kids, facilities include a trampoline, creche and child minding, while older ones can unwind in the teen clubhouse, with console games and other activities.

Agent verdict: "I loved the shabbychic decor and colourful mismatched furnishings. The lobby, with a shuttercovered wall and crystal chandeliers, was amazing. The food was incredible, especially the quirky Colin's Beach Bar & Grill, and the staff were attentive." Maddalena Norio, Gold Medal Book it: Rooms from £310 per night, based on two sharing. sugarbaybarbados.com

BEST FOR... SPA

Stay at: Waves Hotel & Spa by Elegant Hotels

Find it: West coast Sell it: Pitching itself as Barbados's first all-inclusive boutique for 'mind and body', the contemporary 70-room property oozes tranquility. A peaceful adult-only enclave is adjacent to a secluded pool and surrounded by lush gardens, with seven rooms including Elemis spa treatments in a stay.

That's also where guests will find the Shiso Asian Fusion restaurant, while the main building's smart Seascape Mediterranean restaurant spills on to a veranda overlooking an idyllic stretch of beach, with drinks service and complimentary water sports on offer. Agent verdict: "Our time at Waves Hotel & Spa was thoroughly enjoyable. Given a choice of treatments, I opted for a neck and shoulder massage, soothing all my cares away before a nap on a comfy sunlounger by the adult-only pool."

Helen Cox, Tropical Breeze Book it: Rooms from £307 per night. eleganthotels.com



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new resort is due to open its doors in December '17. Here your clients can anjoy world-class cuisine at five signature restaurants, unlimited premium brand drinks at four bars, a lively entertainment area, a 15,000 sq. fr. Ked Lone® Spa. as well Barbados means the launch of many firsts, including Sandals, First Roaltop Pool & Restaurant, Sandals, First Glass Infinity Pool, Sandals, First Bowling Alley – Lovers



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BEST FOR... COUPLES Stay at: Crystal Cove by Elegant Hotels Find it: West coast Sell it: The all-inclusive property makes the most of its beachfront cliff setting, with great sea views afforded by a village-like layout. The 88 rooms and suites feature a private patio or balcony, with colourful features adding a splash of fun to the relaxed ambience. The pool bar is not to be missed,

accessible either through a waterfall or a cave carved from rock

Active guests enjoy a choice of complimentary motorised and non-motorised water sports, two tennis courts and a well-equipped gym. The main Reflections restaurant offers fine dining, Drifters Beach Bar and Restaurant a relaxed barbecue cuisine, and Vista Coffee & Wine

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I couldn't think of a better way to start my day than a delicious breakfast overlooking the crystal-clear water

Bar has speciality coffee cocktails plus great sea views. Agent verdict: "I enjoyed the village setting of Crystal Cove, and liked the personalised messages left in the rock pool. The Vista Coffee & Wine Bar was a real highlight with delicious food and drink, and having an air-conditioned place without having to go back to your room is a bonus." Laura Grunewald, Gold Medal



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LEFT: Crystal Cove by Elegant Resorts

RIGHT: Bougainvillea Beach Resort



Book it: Rooms from £312 per night. eleganthotels.com

BEST FOR... RELAXATION

Stay at: Bougainvillea Beach Resort

Find it: South coast Sell it: This aptly named property is bursting with lush colourful plants, with a scenic location handy for St Lawrence Gap and Oistins Fish Fry.

A renovation programme is transforming 100 rooms into spacious, contemporary suites, while 38 existing units are set to be rebranded as Sand Acres at Bougainvillea.

Each enjoys a balcony or terrace, many with direct access to the swim-up bar, and there's also an impressive waterfall pool and lap pool.

Two breezy restaurants sit

on the edge of the beach: Lanterns by the Sea combines contemporary Caribbean dining with charming rustic decor, while Siam Bar & Restaurant offers a Thai-inspired menu and cocktails. Agent verdict: "Simply a piece of paradise. An excellent beachfront location close to St Lawrence Gap with great restaurants and nightlife. The large apartments are fantastic for families, as they come with a kitchen and living room. The highlight was enjoying a delicious breakfast overlooking the crystal-clear waters - I couldn't think of a better way to start my day." Louise Collins, Avios Book it: Rooms from £130

per night. bougainvillearesort.com 🗰