

True blue

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

“On three, hold your breath and go,” says Ryan, snorkelling guide and captain on the Cool Runnings catamaran.

Just a few metres down in the warm, crystal-clear waters, I’m up-close to the remains of the *Bajan Queen*, a sunken party boat which, having partied too hard, now lies on 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 →

3 OF THE BEST

FOOD & DRINK

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 twerk-like 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 shabby-chic decor and colourful mismatched furnishings. The lobby, with a shutter-covered 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



ABOVE: Agents on Barbados fam trip

LEFT: Oistins Fish Fry



