

Body and mind

Saint Lucia's BodyHoliday resort has everything your clients need for a rejuvenating wellness escape, discovers **Kavi Shah**

As our boat comes to a standstill in the secluded bay of Anse Cochon, the bottle-green water doesn't give away the surprises lurking beneath. I flop in with my snorkel mask and fins, the warm water enveloping me. At first, all I see is sand deep beneath, but as I swim closer to the shallow reefs, my eyes begin flitting from here to there in excitement.

"Can you see that parrotfish?" our snorkel guide Melissa shouts, pointing down. I see it, a striking blue fish, about six times as big as my hand.

"And look here, there's a slippery dick!" she shouts. I quickly pull my head out of the water, expecting this to be another one of her jokes. Turns out, though, it is the name of a fish, so-called

for its knack for escaping, and more formally known as a sand-reef wrasse. I breathe slowly and deliberately through the snorkel, as life of all shapes and sizes swims beneath me. I succumb to the rhythm of the waves and surrender to their movement. It feels like mindfulness meditation.

MINDFUL MOMENTS

The feeling of being present – enveloped by the luscious, sun-soaked land – began on the 90-minute taxi ride from the airport to our four-star wellness-focused hotel, BodyHoliday. We passed rows upon rows of banana trees, pops of yellow catching the eye. Driving under the canopy of dense tropical rainforest – more than two-thirds of the island is ➤

DESTINATIONS

WINTER SUN | SAINT LUCIA



EXCURSIONS

Mud baths at Sulphur Springs:

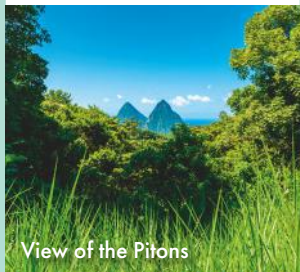
The town of Soufrière translates loosely to 'sulphur mine' because of its dormant volcano, bubbling hot springs, mud baths and a waterfall. Coat yourself in the detoxifying brown stuff before bathing in the waterfall. A trip here is usually coupled with the Diamond Falls Botanical Gardens.

Project Chocolat:

British chocolate brand Hotel Chocolat sources all its cocoa from a plantation in the southwest of the island. Visit and have a go at creating your own chocolate bar using beans grown on the estate. You'll discover every step of a bean's journey from seedling to chocolate, including tasting cocoa pulp cut fresh from the pod.

Gros Piton hike:

The views from the top of the Pitons, Saint Lucia's twin volcanic peaks, are incredible. Most visitors climb Gros Piton (the bigger, less challenging one), which takes at least two hours up and two down, and there are sections where you'll use your hands to climb. The fainthearted can try the Piton Nature Trail, which takes 45 minutes to complete.



View of the Pitons

PICTURE: Shutterstock/Simon Dammhauser



CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW:

Yoga is one of the many activities on offer at BodyHoliday, located on the northwest coast of Saint Lucia

PICTURES: Andreas von Einsiedel



carpeted in it – the deep greens, striking against the clear blue sky, were mesmerising. It brought a sense of inner peace, amplified by the anticipation of a daily inclusive massage at the hotel and morning yoga under the shade of the trees. The sound of whistling frogs, chirping crickets and crashing waves put me to sleep every evening at BodyHoliday. And this was no app, just nature's melody at the upscale, family-run wellness retreat.

Wellness tourism is bouncing back from the pandemic at pace. The Global Wellness Institute predicts a 21% average yearly growth in wellness tourism in the next four years, and expects the sector to be worth \$1.1 trillion by 2025. And BodyHoliday is an ideal place to experience all the trappings of a blissed-out wellness break.

ACTIVE AND RELAXED

The property provides a fun and active beach break, with nutritious food, exercise and relaxation thrown in. Everything is included, from premium spirits at the bar to afternoon tea, classes and spa treatments.

The daily changing roster of activities – think archery, aquafit, guided walks, health talks, paddleboarding, tai chi and waterskiing – is extensive. "It'll take a dedicated person at least three weeks to work through it," says deputy managing director Andrew Barnard.

The guided morning hikes are a highlight: I make new friends, get a flavour of the quiet island life, and

“The property provides a fun and active beach break, with nutritious food, exercise and relaxation thrown in

hit 10,000 steps before 9am. Yes, this must be the only holiday where I want to get up at 7am.

The coastal walk to Pigeon Island is insightful. This was where the French and British fought for Saint Lucia in the late 18th century. Linked to the mainland, the island is now a national park (entry fee applies) and home to military ruins and two beautiful beaches.

Back at the resort, daily visits to the palatial, pillar-lined 36-room spa are a treat; as is the purposefully limited Wi-Fi (accessible only in bedrooms, the lobby and library), which has the brilliant effect of forcing you to put away your phone.

Food options in the five eateries range from gluten-free health-oriented choices to fine dining. If you're craving food to complement your morning yoga practice, an Ayurvedic menu is on offer. In keeping with the ancient Indian philosophy, Ayurvedic cuisine takes a healing approach to improve health and digestion, while balancing the body, mind and spirit. That said, if you ➤

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT:

Aquafit class, archery and spa treatment

PICTURES: Andreas von Einsiedel



hanker after a bacon bap or a cake-based treat for afternoon tea, no one's going to frown upon you, either.

BodyHoliday is not a preachy environment and you don't have to participate in activities if you'd prefer to remain horizontal – you can sunbathe all day, sipping on a coconut plucked from the tree above you.

For those who want a more tailored health experience, doctors and expert therapists are there to guide you through the BodyScience programme (supplementary). "Think of your body like a car – if

it's out of alignment and you only change the tyres, this might help for a few weeks but not much longer," explains Hiley Fulgence, one of the body specialists.

The staff at BodyHoliday elevate the experience: they ooze warmth and go out of their way to help. The fact that the majority of guests (mostly Brits) are returnees – back for the second, third or 20th time – says it all. I leave feeling energised. This was the reset my mind and body desperately needed after being stuck at home for more than a year. I'm hooked, and I'll be back. **TW**

ASK THE expert

"People are looking for somewhere that doesn't just have a spa but that really puts wellbeing at the centre of the holiday, and that's what BodyHoliday is all about. Their strapline – 'give us your body for a week and we'll give you back your mind' – has become really well known. They've got an amazing spa, and you get a 50-minute daily treatment, such as a massage or facial, included in the holiday. Saint Lucia is a classic Caribbean destination. I honestly can't think of anywhere better to relax simply because of the pace of life – it's catching."

Helen Tabois,
senior product manager,
Inspiring Travel
Company



WHAT'S NEW AT BODYHOLIDAY



Garden-to-table dining at l-tal: Don't miss this rustic, intimate vegan dining experience inspired by the Rastafarian ita! diet, which involves cooking organic, vegetarian ingredients without salt. Here, chefs prepare inventive meals with produce from the organic garden – lime sorbet in a cucumber soup, or cactus salad, anyone? It feels like a world away from the resort: you dine under a wooden canopy, with sweeping views of the forest and garden. Insect repellent is essential! (l-tal costs \$85 for dinner).

Calypso and Aurora villas: Ideal for those seeking a private and exclusive stay with friends or family, the new Aurora villa can accommodate up to four people and Calypso up to two people. Both have wraparound balconies with sea views, free-standing baths and personal concierge service. Aurora has its own plunge pool overlooking the ocean, plus a separate kitchen and utilities. A private catering service is available.

BOOK IT

Inspiring Travel Company is offering up to 40% off packages for travel between May 31 and August 31 this year for bookings made by February 4. Seven nights' all-inclusive at BodyHoliday is currently on offer from £2,459, based on two sharing, including economy flights from Gatwick and private car transfers. inspiringtravelcompany.co.uk

A Fit to Fly PCR test with **Qured** costs £64. qured.com