

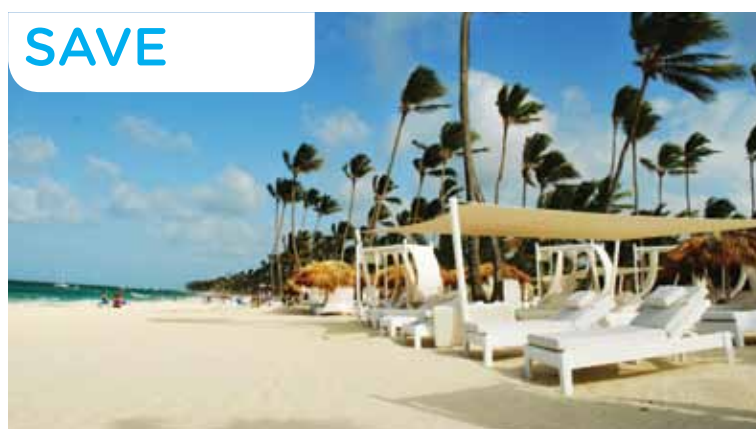
Caribbean WAYS

You can tailor this all-inclusive haven to any budget, says Lucy McGuire

The Caribbean was once a destination that only the most affluent could enjoy, with transatlantic flights and high-end hotels pushing the price beyond the budgets of many travellers.

Yet in the past 10 years or so, all-inclusive accommodation has become more affordable and the growth in charter flights has also helped open up these islands to those with tighter purse strings.

So while one client may still splash out on an £800-plus per night stay in the swankiest hotel in Barbados, another will happily take a full week's holiday



SAVE



SPEND



SPLURGE

PICTURE: LARSEN COLLINGE INTERNATIONAL

in the Dominican Republic for the same price. With Caribbean resorts raising their game, now is the time to take another look at all-inclusive holidays to suit all budgets.

▶ **SAVE**

Traditionally, the Dominican Republic has been the go-to destination for the economy category, and even though new hotel product has started targeting higher price points, there's still plenty to cater for the more budget-conscious. Malcolm Davies, product manager for

Funway Holidays, says it's down to a great family-friendly environment with plenty to do. **OCCIDENTAL GRAND PUNTA CANA:** The southeastern point of Punta Cana, known as the 'Coconut Coast', remains a key purse-friendly destination and a long-standing favourite hotel is the Occidental Grand Punta Cana on Bavaro Beach, which Frommer's once described as one of the world's greatest beach strips. It's a short 20-minute drive from the airport and as the property undergoes refurbishment, it's starting to





SAVE
Funway Holidays offers a seven-night all-inclusive stay at the three-star NYX Cancun from £789 including Virgin Atlantic flights from Gatwick on September 8. funwayagents.co.uk

SPEND
Sandals offers a seven-night all-inclusive stay in a Butler Village Poolside One Bedroom Villa Suite at Sandals Ochi Beach Resort from £1,999 including return flights from London between September 20 and November 30. sellingsandals.co.uk

SPLURGE
Carrier offers seven nights for the price of six at Jade Mountain in Saint Lucia from £5,045, based on two adults sharing a Star Sanctuary on an all-inclusive basis, with British Airways flights from Gatwick and transfers. Offer valid for travel until December 19. carrier.co.uk



ABOVE:
Verandah Resort & Spa

LEFT:
Jade Mountain



ABOVE:
Verandah Resort & Spa

LEFT:
Jade Mountain

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look in better shape. Guests can enjoy four attractive swimming pools and 12 restaurants, from your usual buffet to a seafood restaurant and steakhouse.

Renovated rooms have walk-in showers and spacious balconies and the kids' club and evening entertainment are included, plus there's the option to upgrade to the Royal Club for VIP access to the Royal Club Restaurant and Arena Bar.

NYX CANCUN: For the purse-savvy traveller who likes a livelier, flashier scene (and doesn't mind an extra hour in the air), Cancun is another Funway favourite, according to Davies. He says: "Mexico is an affordable sun trap and one of our top destinations. All-inclusive hotels here deliver surprising luxury, service and cuisine at a price that's right."

With seven days' all-inclusive starting from as low as £391 in October, the NYX Cancun is a prime example of Mexico's budget breaks. Located in the middle of the Hotel Zone, this is another hotel that's received a recent nip and tuck. Expect light and airy spaces with contemporary decor, and the all-inclusive deal includes local-brand liquors and Mexican beers.

Its showstopping feature is the ocean view and beautiful sandy beach, which you can see from the pool. Roadside-facing rooms offer sunset views over the lagoon.

JOLLY BEACH RESORT & SPA: British Airways, Virgin Atlantic and Thomas

Cook all fly direct to family-friendly Antigua and the high-quality kids' clubs you'll find at Jolly Beach Resort & Spa - priced at around the £840 mark for seven days - make it a favourite among frugal families. Rooms offer straightforward Caribbean decor, and dining ranges from the grab-and-go beach bars to a casual buffet and Indian à la carte. For entertainment, expect evening karaoke, live music and an on-site casino. The mile-long Jolly Beach is just one of the 365 fantastic bays you'll find on this laid-back island.

▶ SPEND

Resorts such as Sandals, Beaches and Couples really nail the 'more bang for your buck' type of holiday, with Sandals claiming to offer 'more quality inclusions than any other resort on the planet'.

Clients who book Sandals can expect personal butler service, free Wi-Fi, all dining and top-shelf spirits and premium wines. Many motorised water sports (including waterskiing and sailing), aqua centres with Padi certification and unlimited golf with no green fees (in their Jamaica and Saint Lucia properties) are also included.

SANDALS: With 52 rooms, Sandals Carlyle is the brand's smallest resort so it's a great one for those who want to combine a mid-range all-inclusive hotel with a boutique feel. Staff are attentive, rooms are furnished in mahogany four-poster beds and there are three dining venues.

Those who prefer a livelier resort might be better suited to the nearby Sandals Montego Bay. It's slightly more expensive, yet offers nine restaurants, a stunning private beach, more room and butler-service categories and sleek interiors. After renovations this year, its newly built One Bedroom Butler Villa Suites (aka Love Nest Suites) offer spa-style bathrooms and outdoor soaking tubs, ideal for honeymooners.

These palatial suites can also be found at the Sandals Royal Caribbean Resort & Private Island, which is up another notch on the price scale, tailored to the well-heeled Sandals crowd. With a Georgian-style Great House, a private island and some of the best dining across the Sandals group, it goes above and beyond to impress. Expect romantic cabanas, swim-up suites and the 'stay at one, play at all', exchange programme that allows guests to use the amenities of all three hotels, transfers included.

VERANDAH RESORT & SPA: With a good selection of four-star all-inclusive hotels, Antigua is a great alternative. The Verandah Resort & Spa has a huge free-form pool, 'village' of attractive Caribbean cottage-style

architecture, kids' club and non-motorised sports. The aesthetics are pretty straightforward but the wooden verandas and stairways create an authentic feel. The beach, which fringes the Devil's Bridge National Park, is sublime. Prices at Verandah Resort & Spa, which is about 30 minutes' drive from the island's airport, start from £1,349 for a week.

▶ SPLURGE

A heftier budget will generally give travellers access to boutique-style resorts, exclusive locations and hotels nestled within historic properties. Expect unique and charming, opulent and flashy, or somewhere in between - with, it goes without saying, a deserved five-star rating.

JADE MOUNTAIN RESORT: The 29 suites of Jade Mountain Resort, perched on the hillside by Anse Chastanet Beach in Saint Lucia, is a great starting point. This high-design property is the work of architect Nick Troubetzkoy and with in-room infinity pools and mesmerising views of the Piton Mountains from each room's 'missing fourth wall', it's a dream for those seeking something

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unique. Packages generally guarantee 24-hour butler service, scuba diving and access to water sports facilities. Guests can dine on award-winning modern fusion cuisine either here or at sister resort Anse Chastanet. A seven-night all-inclusive stay comes with a price tag anywhere between £3,000 and £8,000, but with wow factor guaranteed.

JUMBY BAY, A ROSEWOOD RESORT: It's the 300-acre private-island location that makes Jumby Bay, A Rosewood Resort stand out. Reachable only by boat from Antigua, this collection of 40 rooms, suites and estate homes generally comes with a £4,000 price tag for a week, but it's among the Caribbean's most serene destinations.

The tastefully decorated Rondavel rooms are equipped with 42-inch TVs, Nespresso machines, Italian linens and wrap-around terraces with outdoor showers. Those who want to splash the cash even more can choose from three categories of suites, whose plush living rooms, in-room dining, outdoor tub and fabulous views are sure to wow. Upscale dining is offered across four bars and eateries, and the Rose Bud's programme and children's pavilion keep youngsters entertained.

PARROT CAY BY COMO: Health and spa holidays are the luxury holiday du jour (*Body and Soul*, page 56), and so are those that wrap a digital detox in a handy all-inclusive package. Those who want to blow the budget on a virtuous escape will completely buy in to Como Hotels; cue the all-inclusive offerings at Como Parrot Cay, a private island in Turks and Caicos. Service is personable, the setting intimate and the location sublime. An all-inclusive stay equates to free yoga and pilates classes, 24-hour butlers, access to personal trainers and expertly crafted Como Shambhala menus. A full-board stay in a dreamy Balinese-style suite here can go up to the £4,000 mark. **TW**

ASK THE EXPERT

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 Ashley Pilkington, Caribbean product manager, Gold Medal
 "Agents selling luxury holidays should highlight what makes the hotel or destination so exclusive, such as the stunning location, elegantly designed rooms and suites, and the special touches or extra mile the hotel goes."



LEFT:
Jolly Beach Resort & Spa