

Go west for less

You can give clients champagne on a beer budget, even in the Caribbean, writes Jo Cooke

The West Indies is often seen as a big-ticket destination, but it needn't be. Among all its gorgeous luxury properties is a bunch of fabulous bargain bases. They have a touch of style and class that make them feel like boutique hotels, but without a price tag that might make you wince. Here's our pick of budget-friendly bases that still treat guests to the full Caribbean experience.

► VILLAGE PEOPLE

Where? Grand Bahia Principe El Portillo, Las Terrenas, Samana Peninsula, Dominican Republic
Why? You'll find it standing alone on the outskirts of a former fishing village and edging an idyllic, palm-fringed beach. With 606 rooms, Grand Bahia Principe El Portillo's accommodation is in low-rise blocks facing neatly tended lawns, with room

furnishings bright and floral.

It has the full menu of amenities too – pools, kids' club, water sports, tennis, evening entertainment and more.

The hotel is a great choice for those who like to get a feel for local life. A short taxi ride will take guests into Las Terrenas, where restaurants dot the waterfront, and cafes, bars and gift shops line the criss-cross of streets at the resort's centre.

One of the Dominican Republic's most mesmerising attractions, Salto El Limon waterfall, is also close by.

Any drawbacks? Clients are looking at a significant transfer time, typically four hours from Puerto Plata airport.

Price tag: Tui offers seven nights' all-inclusive from £758 per person based on two sharing and including flights and transfers.
tui.co.uk ➔

➔ HIGH LIVING

Where? Sugar Cane Club, Barbados
Why? For decades, celebrities have been making a beeline for Barbados, attracted by the upscale hotels. But the island has just as many high-quality, low-cost options. The neighbourhood of St Lawrence Gap is a great choice for guests who are counting the pennies but still want to be a short walk from a beach. If your clients can forgo instant access to the sand, however, the Sugar Cane Club has an exclusive, easy-living feel.

Etched into the hillside above popular Speightstown and fringed by sugar cane fields, this 43-suite property boasts great views, cosy accommodation and an intimate bar and restaurant, all shrouded by mature vegetation. The gardeners are so proud of their creation they'll take you on a guided tour.

Guests can also chill by one of the two pools, browse the on-site art gallery or be pampered in the petite spa. When they do fancy a little time beside the seaside, a free shuttle bus is there to oblige.

Any drawbacks? Taxi fares to and from surrounding restaurants can add up, but the resort also offers all-inclusive from £67 per day.

Price tag: C by Caribtours offers seven nights' room-only from £1,056 per person based on two sharing and including flights and transfers. cbycaribtours.co.uk



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▶ HELLO, SAILOR!

Where? True Blue Bay, Grenada
Why? Small properties are the staple of the spice island, with barely a high-rise hotel in sight. Establishments are dotted across Grenada, and each location has its unique selling points.

For a balance of seclusion and action, try True Blue Bay. The resort occupies an inlet on the south coast and its 48 cottage-style units form a crescent around the property's marina. All are tastefully decorated with an eclectic combination of contemporary and traditional fixtures and fittings, and have kitchenettes.

Guests also have excellent water sports facilities on their doorstep – or rather at their dock side. You can arrange scuba dives or training, rent a kayak, go deep-sea fishing or even charter a yacht from here.

There are two pools and two play areas for kiddies, and you don't have to stray for your nightlife either. Dodgy Dock bar and restaurant is the



PICTURE: SHUTTERSTOCK

ABOVE: Salto El Limon, Dominican Republic

BELOW: Grande Anse, Grenada

heart of the resort, and a hot spot for locals, tourists and passing yachties alike, with frequent jamming sessions accompanying the rum punches.

Any drawbacks? There isn't a beach, ➔





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→ but a free 10-minute shuttle takes you to Grand Anse, one of the best on the island.

Price tag: C by Caribtours offers seven nights with continental breakfast from £1,025 per person based on two sharing and including flights and transfers. cbcaribtours.co.uk

▶ HOORAY FOR HOLLYWOOD!

Where? Couples Tower Isle Hotel, Ocho Rios, Jamaica

Why? Not only do you get more bang for your buck at this art deco treasure, but former guests include the likes of Walt Disney, Lena Horne, Errol Flynn and Louis Armstrong. You can see photos of them as guests on the walls of the swanky piano bar.



Former guests include Walt Disney and Errol Flynn – you can see photos of them in the swanky piano bar

Outside, there's an awesome arc of soft white sand meeting turquoise waters, and as you stretch out on your sun lounger, you can rest assured it's one of the best beaches in Ocho Rios.

For those who want an all-over tan, a speedboat whizzes you across to the resort's natural, private offshore island.

Romantics will enjoy the over-water Thai speciality restaurant that's torchlit at night, while sports fans will appreciate the complimentary tee times at a nearby 18-hole golf course and daily scuba dives.

The inclusions here are part of the wow factor. You won't even have to shell out to see Jamaica's most-visited attraction, Dunn's River Falls. And after all that activity, the 226 rooms have luxurious bathrooms and sumptuous beds.

Any drawbacks? It's a 10-minute bus ride to the bustling shops and markets of the resort centre, but a free shuttle is scheduled to take you there and back.

Price tag: Tui offers seven nights' all-inclusive from £1,258 per

person based on two sharing and including flights and transfers.

tui.co.uk

▶ GET THE PARTY STARTED

Where? Bay Gardens Beach Resort, Saint Lucia

Why? Location, location, location! This mighty-fine pound-stretcher is at the hub of the action, as well as enjoying a toehold on a spectacular beach. The 78 pool-side rooms and lobby of Bay Gardens Beach Resort have an old-school, colonial look that adds charm.

Clients need only wend their way through the tropical gardens to land on the white sand of lively Reduit Beach, arguably the most alluring in Saint Lucia. If, instead, guests head back through the →

→ lobby, they can take a short stroll into Rodney Bay resort centre, with its umpteen bars, shops and restaurants.

Bay Gardens is family-run, and guests can expect a home-from-home welcome plus lots of insider tips for excursions and activities. The floating Splash Island Water Park, made up of trampolines and inflatables, is also a stone's throw away.

Any drawbacks? The resort is in a busy location so it can be a little noisy at times.

Price tag: C by Caribtours offers seven nights with breakfast from £1,199 per person based on two sharing and including flights and transfers.

cbycaribtours.co.uk

▶ HAPPY LANDINGS

Where? Oualie Beach Resort, Nevis

Why? Nevis is one of the most exclusive enclaves in the

Caribbean, typically attracting those who can spend top dollar. However, there's a cute little property right on the shoreline that's a steal. Gingerbread cottage-style accommodation faces a secluded bay that has views across to St Kitts.

The 32 rooms are modestly furnished and have patios or verandas. Oualie Beach Resort is a sleepy spot – aside from boats landing and music nights at the oceanfront restaurant.

Water sports, including scuba, can be arranged on-site, as can excursions to Georgetown, the delightful, pint-sized capital, and glorious Pinney's Beach, where a lobster lunch at a beach shack won't break the bank either.

Since clients have saved on accommodation, they might be able to splash out on afternoon tea at one of the island's signature swanky resorts too, such as the Four Seasons or



ABOVE: Oualie Beach Resort, Nevis

Montpelier Plantation.

Any drawbacks? After flying into St Kitts, guests have a short transfer to the dock, then a 20-minute ferry ride to Nevis. That said, it's scenically spectacular because there is a

great view of both islands as you cross between them.

Price tag: Funway Holidays offers seven nights' room-only including flights and transfers from £1,027 per person based on two sharing.

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