

Take it S

LOW

The most relaxing island in the Caribbean? Our money's on Nevis

@JoBooth_travel

When visitors reset their watches after their international flight lands at Robert L Bradshaw International airport in St Kitts, there should really be an alternative to Atlantic Standard Time. Because if they're going to be staying on the sister island of Nevis, normal minutes and hours won't seem very relevant.

The sense that something is a little different about Nevis

starts with the airport transfer. After a half-an-hour drive to Reggae Beach at the south of St Kitts, we board the water taxi for Nevis. This is probably the best taxi ride in the world. For starters, it's six minutes long. (We haven't landed on Nevis yet, so we're still using those measures of time.) This is just long enough to enjoy the boat ride, appreciate the lovely views, bask in a little sunshine and drink



The water taxi to Nevis is probably the best taxi ride in the world

one of the complimentary Carib beers. And stepping off the boat on to the jetty on Nevis, I think I

feel my heartbeat start to slow. Everything is so... relaxed. Even by Caribbean standards.

▶ **LOW-KEY SIGHTS**

Nevis is small, but rather perfectly formed. With one main road circling the 36-square-mile island and a few criss-crossing the interior, it's difficult to get lost - as our guide John tells us, "if you think you're lost you're just temporarily misplaced".



TOP TIP
Find out more about activities and accommodation in Nevis at nevisisland.com

➔ Most visitors have a hardcore holiday regimen of doing not-very-much in the sunshine, and even the sights and activities on Nevis are low-key and stress-free. There are some geothermal hot springs – packed full of health-giving minerals, so I'm told – but all these require of you is sitting still in the warm water. (And boy, is it warm. A word to the wise, don't head there at the hottest time of the day.)

The short drive around the island – clients can either hire a car, or get their hotel to organise a guide for a day – reveals a handful of cute little churches where you can stick your head around the door. We checked out St Thomas', the first Anglican church in the Caribbean, which dates back to 1643 and has views from the graveyard that you'd happily look at for eternity.

Like the rest of the Caribbean, sugar was once Nevis's main industry, and the island is dotted with old plantations. The New River Estate Sugar Mill was the last to cease operation on the island and is well-preserved, so a quick wander around reveals a host of rather epic Victorian machinery.

The pretty little capital Charlestown



Nevis does have some more value-friendly accommodation, but this is an island best suited to the top of the market

has a market and a few boutiques, and is home to the island's largest museum. The Museum of Nevis History – two whole rooms! – is also the birthplace of Alexander Hamilton, the island's most famous son. The museum quickly outlines both the story of the island from the colonial period on, and also the story of Hamilton himself. Though he's better known to visitors from the US than the UK – he helped draft the US Constitution and was the first secretary of the Treasury – he lived a truly extraordinary life right up to the end when he died in a duel.

For a small island, Nevis has had its fair share of celebs, with claims to Nelson as well as Hamilton. The British Admiral fell in love with a local girl, Fanny Nisbet, and married her,

as guests at the even smaller Horatio Nelson Museum can discover.

By this point, Nevis will more than likely have lulled clients into its slow-paced charms, but anyone determined to be more active can easily be accommodated, with horse riding tours, scuba diving and snorkelling, and even a hike up to the top of the almost-constantly-cloud-capped Mount Nevis. If I'd stayed even a day longer, I'm sure I would have got round to that one...

RELAXING STAYS

Nevis does have some more value-friendly accommodation, but this is really an island best suited to the top of the market. Most of the hotels are five-star, but happily they all have very different characters, ranging from the large, family-friendly but rather international-feeling Four Seasons to the traditional, historic, hillside Montpelier Plantation, where Princess Diana stayed. We stayed in two very different but equally gorgeous properties, the well-established Nisbet Plantation and the brand-new Paradise Beach Nevis.

Nisbet is the Caribbean's only



Caribtours offers seven nights' half-board in a Superior Room at Nisbet Plantation from £1,665, including return flights, private transfers and the use of a UK airport lounge. This 'seven night for the price of five' offer applies on stays between April 1 and December 19 when booked by February 29. caribtours.co.uk

Western & Oriental offers seven nights at Paradise Beach Nevis from £3,500 per person based on two adults sharing a Garden Villa and includes return flights and private transfers in September. westernandoriental.com



AD

→ historic plantation inn set on the beach, and that isn't the only thing that makes it unique. Understanding Nisbet and the type of guests it suits is less to do with decor and facilities – although these are both lovely – than it is to do with the way the staff interact with guests and the atmosphere that creates. Many hotels say they want guests to feel at home, but few follow through the way Nisbet does. Every year brings back a huge number of 'repeaters', and they're not the only thing that sticks around. Staff are long-serving too – it's not unusual to find both staff and guests who have been at Nisbet for more than 20 years.

However, this isn't somewhere where newcomers are made to feel out of things or awkward. Service is just as friendly for first-timers, and guests tend to be chatty with each other too. The weekly beach barbecue at the Sea Breeze Beach Bar, where a veritable banquet is followed by a live band, is particularly good for mingling, and attracts not only residents but also guests and locals from outside the hotel.

The 36 rooms are spread through the lush grounds in two-storey cottages, decked out in soft hues and comfortable, classic Caribbean style. I

“
Many hotels say they want guests to feel at home, but few follow through the way Nisbet does

found the wooden louvred shutter windows of our upper premier junior suite meant I could have the lovely cooling breeze off the sea day and night without the danger of gnat bites, and the benefit of a balcony with views down to the beach.

The beach restaurant is where breakfast is served – there is a huge choice of dishes plus a buffet and daily specials – and where the hotel pool sits, close to the beach. Nisbet is on the tip of the northeast coast, and so the sea is a little rough for swimming, but great for kitesurfing, and the beach and pool area have plenty of sunloungers and hammocks for sunbathing and watching the pelicans – the island's national bird – dive-bombing into the shallows. The

spa, the small gym and the tennis courts surround the Great House.

This original plantation building is set behind the cottages, and is the location for the atmospheric restaurant where dinner is served. The menu changes daily, and with three options for all three courses, it keeps executive chef Tony on his toes. Afternoon tea with scones and sandwiches is served in the lounge or on the terrace. The food really is excellent, and Nisbet is introducing cooking experiences to give guests a greater insight into Nevisian cuisine. We thoroughly enjoyed taking a tour of the island to buy fresh ingredients with Chef Elsa, stopping at the hydroponics farm, where the hotel sources its fresh vegetables, and Charlestown market, before heading back to the hotel to prepare wahoo with fried plantains and a salad.

While Nisbet provides a very communal holiday experience in a setting full of old-world charm, the new Paradise Beach Nevis offers utter privacy and sleek, modern looks. This collection of seven villas set on the island's west coast is tailored to those who value seclusion, with walled courtyards containing your own →

BOTTOM LEFT:
Charlestown

BOTTOM RIGHT:
Fishing,
Nevis-style



ASK AN EXPERT



Ann Barber,
Travel Counsellors

“Nevis is an amazing little island. I tend not to return to long-haul destinations but I find myself here again on my fifth visit. The island, although geared up for tourism with a selection of accommodation from basic to luxury, retains its individuality and authenticity. The people are delightful and I now have genuine friends there.”

Chris Curgenvin,
independent travel consultant

“I first visited Nevis in the 1980s on a family holiday and I grab every chance to return and experience the lovely hospitality. It’s perfect for families, couples and, most importantly, safe for single travellers, me included. With amazing beaches, water, scenery, restaurants, beach bars and people, Nevis ticks all the boxes for me. It’s quiet, quaint, quirky and laidback, just like other more-developed Caribbean islands were 15 years ago.”

➔ private garden, sunbathing terrace and a good-sized pool.

The enormous two, three and four-bedroom villas have high thatched roofs and are almost Balinese in style, with lots of wood and fabrics in restful, natural colours. Every room in our four-bedroom villa was en-suite, with two rooms also enjoying outdoor as well as indoor showers. The walls facing the pool terrace, both in the bedrooms and the living area, are huge sliding glass doors, so everything is light and airy.

The beach, just steps from the villas, is beautiful – all warm golden sand, and on this west coast, calm Caribbean waters perfect for swimming. There’s a beach bar, and we took a yoga lesson on the nearby deck – happily when the bar wasn’t too full with spectators.

There’s no restaurant, but when guests don’t want to eat out or self-cater, the hotel can organise a private chef to come and cook in the fully equipped villa kitchen. We were



By the end of the trip, I had switched not only on to Nevis time but also on to a special Nevis belt-notch

given a real treat, with our friendly chef whipping up saltfish and johnny cakes for breakfast and later a banquet of mahi with mango and incredible chocolate bread pudding for dinner.

▶ GOURMET FLAVOURS

It is almost impossible to eat badly on Nevis, whether you’re in a beach bar or a swanky restaurant. We tried as many options as we could fit into a week, and returned stuffed and happy from them all.

When it comes to simple beachside eats, clients can’t go wrong down at

Pinney’s Beach, both inside the bright wooden walls of Sunshines Beach Bar, where the wings have a real kick, or at the neighbouring Double Deuce, which serves the best burgers on the island.

But this classy island has restaurants to match its high-end accommodation too. Also beachside is Coconut Grove, where local ingredients are turned into delicate, beautiful dishes under a soaring thatched roof with views over to the twinkling lights of St Kitts. Inland, perched on the slopes of Mount Nevis, Bananas Bistro is gorgeously atmospheric, with brightly coloured local art on the walls and tasty dishes served inside or on the terrace. The terrace restaurant at the Golden Rock Inn has an even more jungly feel, with tables surrounded by the lush plantation foliage and water gardens.

By the end of the trip, I found I had switched not only on to Nevis time but also on to a special Nevis belt-notch. I defy any visitor to leave the island either stressed or underfed. **TW**



ABOVE: Nisbet Plantation
LEFT: Coconut Grove
TOP LEFT: Paradise Beach Nevis